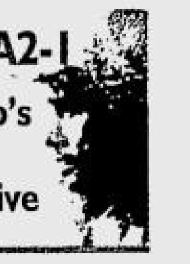
■ Lifestyle / D2
Hollywood's favorite fashion brand comes to Asia thru RP

■ News / A2
Palace laughs off ruling on Marcos wealth

■ Business / B1
SMC offers $1.37B for Australian dairy firm

■ Across / A15
Solon says nat'l gov't cheating LGUs of billions from value-added tax

■ Entertainment / A2-1
Cesar Montano's film: Poetic, magical, sensitive



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Confusing numbers game: How the dead are counted

CUDDALORE, India—In the ocean of human loss arising from Sunday's tsunami destruction in Asia stand little armies of stone-faced officials who have no time for grief or shock. Their job is to count the bodies.

Their success has ranged from moderate in Sri Lanka and Thailand, spectacular in India to abysmal in Indonesia. The result is a death

CONFUSING/ A6

Estrada shakes off surgery jitters with few 'Eraptions'

By Armand N. Nocum

BAKA TUMANGKAD KA PA SA BAGONG TAON!

HONG KONG—Even as he admits to being nervous over the prospect of going under the knife, ousted President Joseph Estrada can still dish out a few

ESTRADA/ A8

Erap surgery called off

'This is not a time to be happy'

SEVERAL Asian countries yesterday cancelled New Year celebrations as millions of people across the continent scrambled for food and clean water to battle hunger and disease after the most devastating tsunami on record.

The death toll rose to more than 114,000 but the true scale of the disaster may not be known for weeks, if ever, as rescuers in history's biggest relief operations struggled to reach remote areas and grieving survivors searched for bodies.

UN officials say children could make up a third of victims.

In Hong Kong, the Tourism Commission said it would cancel fireworks displays scheduled for New Year's Eve, New Year's Day and Jan. 2.

In Malaysia, Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi ordered all government-level celebrations to be canceled and substituted with prayer ceremonies, urging the private sector to do likewise.

"This is not a time to be happy," Abdullah said.

Malaysian officials have recovered the bodies of 66 people killed in Sunday's disaster, and are searching for up to 100 still missing. So far, organizers have scrapped New Year's Eve countdown parties and concerts typically held at landmarks such as the Petronas Twin Towers.

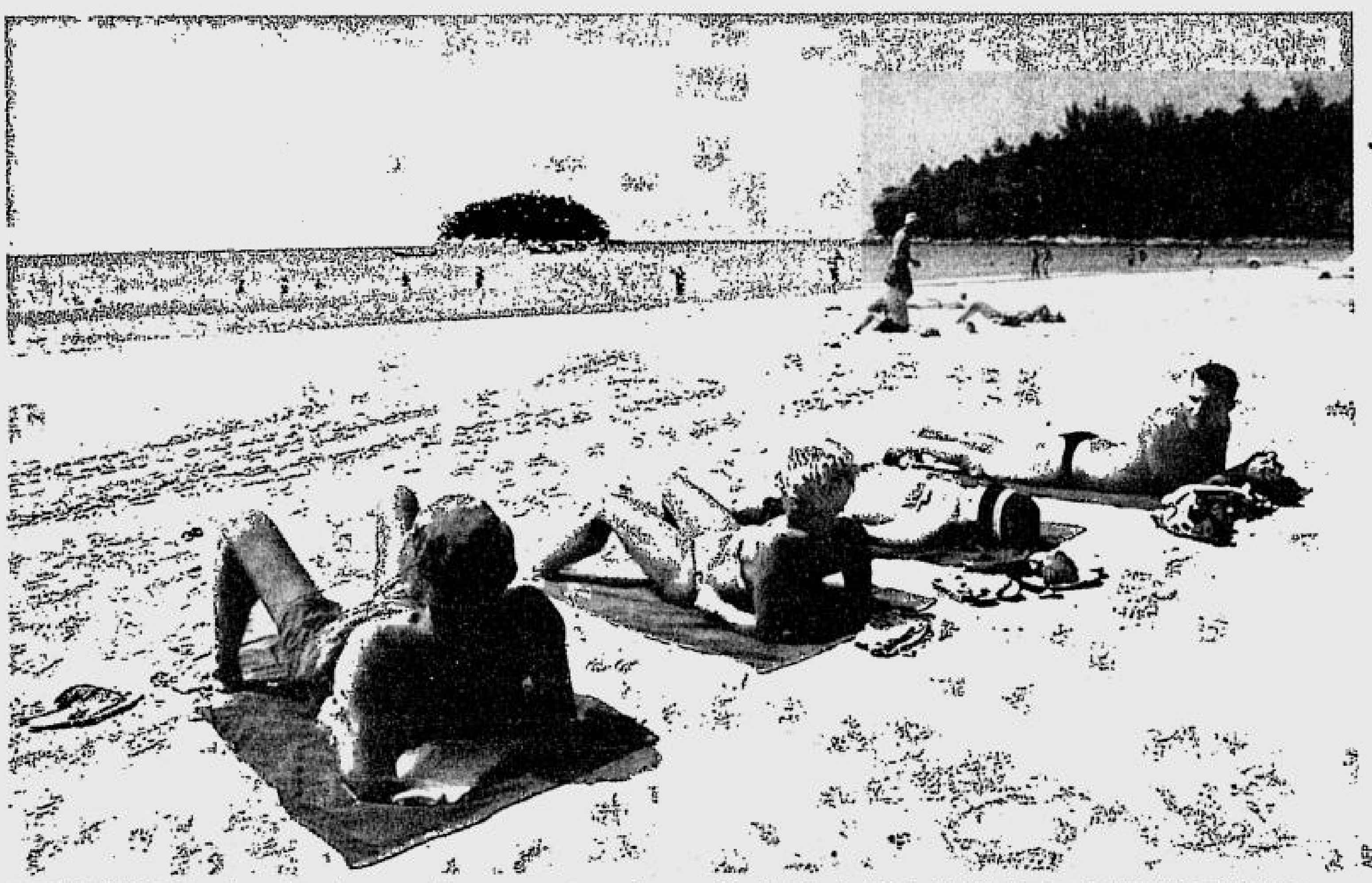
Singapore's main arts center said its New Year's Eve performance would now be a remembrance service for the tens of thousands killed by the earthquake and tsunami waves.

A minute's silence will be held at midnight instead of the traditional raucous countdown in the final seconds of the year, the Esplanade-Theaters on the Bay said.

A giant firework display has been canceled.

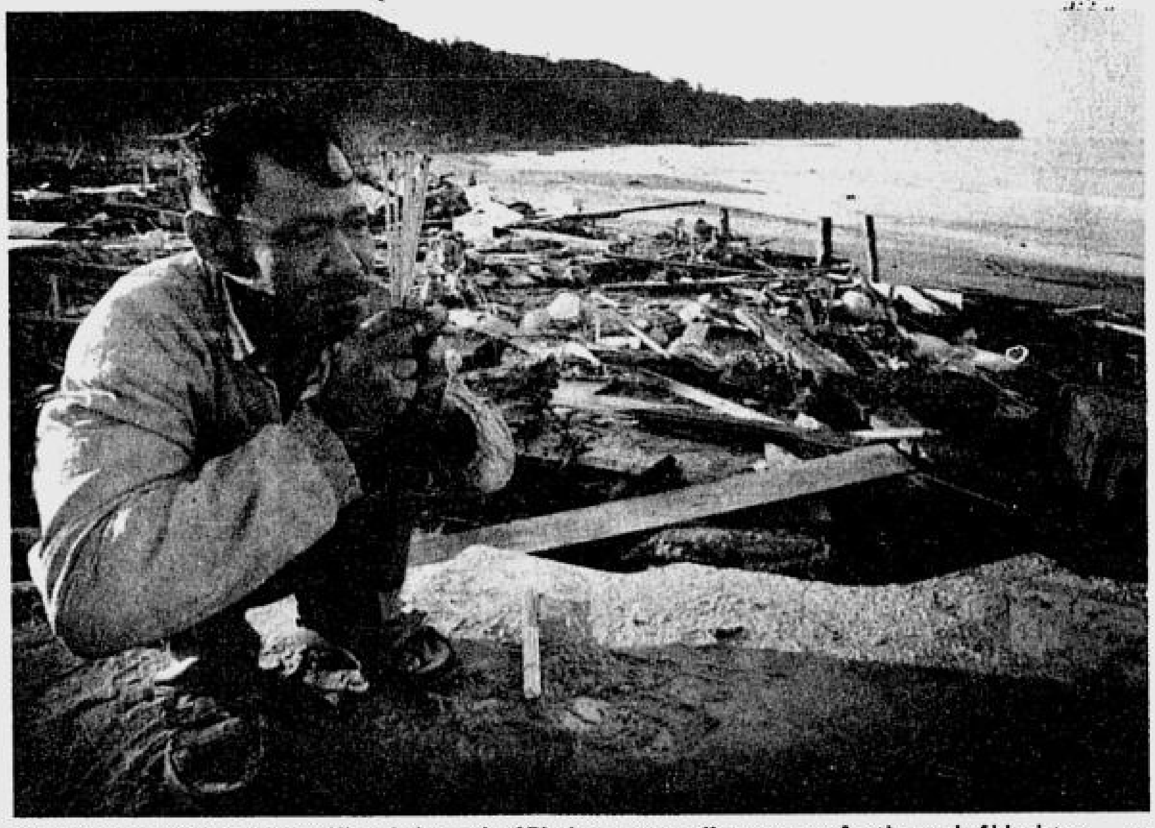
"This year, in light of the tragedy unfolding around us, it would be more appropriate to usher in the new year in a more contemplative manner," the Es

THIS IS/ A6



ARE THEY MAD? Two days after the waves of horror swept away thousands in the island of Phuket in Thailand and while history's largest relief operation is under way, four members of the Hunt family from the UK take the risk to go sunbathing on Kata beach. Ah, life is a beach. AFP

A ma's dilemma, other tales of tragedy



DAWN along the beach near Khao Lak north of Phuket, a man offers prayers for the soul of his sister. AP

IT'S THE stuff of many a parent's nightmare: Which of her two children would she keep and which would she let go?

That was the choice that confronted Australian mother Jillian Searle as a devastating tsunami swamped her and her family in the Phuket resort of Thailand.

An Indonesian mother in Banda Aceh was spared such a dilemma. Badly injured and knowing she would not live, she handed her twins to another woman, who brought them to safety—guided by a snake swimming beside her.

As rescue workers struggled yesterday to locate tens of thousands still missing after Sunday's deadly tsunami waves swamped Asian and African coastlines, bittersweet tales emerged.

The nightmare over which of her children to keep was all too real for Searle.

Battered by monster waves outside a Phuket hotel, Searle was struggling to stay afloat holding her 5-year-old son Lachie and

A MA'S/ A6

US surgeon fails to get HK permit to operate

By Armand N. Nocum and Volt Contreras

HONG KONG—Trust ousted President Joseph Estrada to create a stir even when he is supposed to be hobbled by arthritis and preparing for knee replacement surgery.

Estrada, described here as a "superstar patient," had been prepped for his operation, tentatively scheduled for 9 a.m. yesterday, and had even fasted for it.

But the operation fell through when Hong Kong medical authorities refused to permit his US-based surgeon, Christopher Mow, to operate on the disgraced leader here.

"I don't know why this had to happen to me," said Estrada, who seemed more despondent over the fact that he had to fast for the postponed surgery.

He said he had no plans on what he would do should the operation not push through.

Mow earlier said he would be returning to the United States on Jan. 1.

"I didn't know that I will be encountering this problem. Dr. Mow has been operating here since last year. Maybe there is a professional jealousy among doctors here. I also learned that the other hospitals are envious of the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital because many foreigners come here for treatment," the ex-President said.

Estrada, who is being tried on corruption and plunder charges, was interviewed in his P20,905-a-day hospital room.

The South China Morning Post newspaper reported that Estrada had rented four private rooms for 10 people to stay in at the hospital, including himself and his private doctor from Manila, Larry Jocson.

Estrada has also rented a 2,700-sq-ft flat at Park View, where rents are as high as P506,709 a month. He stayed in the flat on Tuesday night, the Post said.

Over the past two days, he un-

ERAP/ A8

RP sending forensic team to Phuket, docs to Sri Lanka

By TJ Burgonio and Alex Pal
PDI Visayas Bureau

WHILE awaiting word on the fate of Filipinos in tsunami-hit countries, the government is sending a team of forensic experts to Thailand to help document hundreds of bodies still awaiting identification, including 16 with Filipino-sounding names. The government is also sending a medical team to Sri Lanka.

Sharleen May Ang Tan, a Filipino reported missing in Phuket island, has been confirmed dead as the number of other Filipinos possibly missing stood at 22, officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs said yesterday.

President Macapagal-Arroyo ordered the dispatch of a forensic team to Thailand to assist in the documentation of the bodies that had yet to be claimed by their relatives, DFA spokesperson Gilberto Asuque said.

"The assistance of the forensic experts will

RP SENDING/ A6

Yorac bucks PCGG downgrade

By Ceres P. Doyo and Fe Zamora

THE CHAIR of the Presidential Commission on Good Government, Haydee Yorac, yesterday reacted sharply to reports that the commission that she heads may be downgraded to an attached agency of an expanded agrarian reform department.

"We were created by law and an administrative order cannot amend a law," said Yorac.

She claimed, however, that she had not seen the administrative order nor had she received any order, verbal or written, from Malacañang informing her of the new arrangement.

But Yorac said she heard about it "through word of mouth."

The agency, which is pursuing the criminal and forfeiture cases against the Marcoses and their associates, had remained under the Of-

YORAC/ A8

Stars Vilma, Boyet shine brightest

By Marinel R. Cruz

SHORT and sweet.

Make that short and sedate.

The awards ceremony for the 30th Metro Manila Film Festival, now called MMFF Philippines, on Wednesday night was over in three hours, where it used to take twice as long. It was also less colorful than last year's edition and the one before that, with more spontaneous action—a flea market and an auction of movie memorabilia—happening right outside the venue, the Aliw Theater at the Cultural Center of the Philippines complex.

Even the "Stars of the Night," Vilma Santos and Christopher de Leon, wore black and grey.

A series of technical problems early on in the show was the closest that the evening got to being "eventful." There were no walkouts, no brickbats, no exposed breasts. In short, the proceedings were orderly and the sexy starlets behaved. Juliana Palermo—she who flaunted her assets without breast-beating at a previous show biz event—was in a cover-all debutante-pink gown that was almost puritan white.

Producer Lily Monteverde's tearful acceptance speech—for her MAQ Films' "Mano Po 3" as Best Picture—was met with no more than polite applause.

STARS/ A8

RUDY ESPERAS

THE BEST there is: Vilma Santos and Christopher de Leon triumph at the Metro Manila Film Fest awards night at the Aliw Theater.

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Eastern Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao will continue to experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers and isolated thunderstorms becoming widespread rains over Mindanao. The rest of Luzon will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies.
SOURCE: PAGASA

COMPILED BY: RAY LEYESA, PDI RESEARCH/12/31/04

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains
Calapan	Cloudy with Rains	Davao	Cloudy with Rains

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Palace laughs off ruling on FM money

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

MALACAÑANG yesterday laughed off a United States court's decision blocking access to the $638-million bank deposits of former President Ferdinand Marcos, saying the funds were already in government's hands.

"The ruling is academic because we are already holding the funds that are the subject of the court case," said Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye in an interview with RMN radio.

The US 9th Circuit Court of Appeals on Tuesday rejected an appeal by the Philippine government to challenge the $150-million settlement reached between human rights victims and the Marcos estate in 1998.

The court ruling effectively prevents the government from touching the $683 million held in escrow by the Philippine National Bank among other Marcos assets held in various banks around the world.

But Bunye said the ruling would have no bearing on the government's pursuit of assets illegally amassed by the Marcoses, specifically the PNB money.

"The assets have been turned over to us and have been earmarked, pending legislation, for compensation to human rights victims and land reform," he said, adding the US court was "just proceeding according to their process."

"What is important for us is that whatever amount is being talked about is already in the hands of the Republic," he said.

Former Presidential Commission on Good Government chair Jovito Salonga agreed with Malacañang.

Salonga said more than $500 million from the $683-million Marcos wealth has been deposited by the government to fund agrarian reform.

"That has already been transferred to the hands of the PCGG, and deposited to the DAR," Salonga said in an interview.

Of the $683 million, Salonga said $100 million was earmarked for the human rights victims. He said the legal fees of the lawyers hired by the PCGG to pursue the ill-gotten wealth case against the Marcoses were also deducted.

"The INQUIRER report on Page 2 [Dec. 30, 2004, issue] is wrong," Salonga said.

The INQUIRER reported that a US court had blocked the Philippine government's access to some $683 million Marcos money currently held in escrow by the PNB.

At the Senate, Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. said yesterday that Congress should immediately pass a bill that seeks to compensate human rights victims of the Marcos dictatorship following the decision of the US court.

Pimentel said this bill could be tackled in the special session called by Malacañang on Jan.5 to 7.

"This is to show America that we have our own legal system," Pimentel said.

The government had challenged the $150-million settlement to be given to the human rights victims, but the US federal court said Manila could not do so because it was not a party to the settlement agreement.

In a phone interview, Pimentel, who sponsored the human rights compensation bill in the Senate, said the country already had the settlement money in its hands.

The bill had already been sponsored on the Senate floor as early as November and had undergone deliberations.

It aims to set aside P20 billion as compensation for rights victims of the Marcos regime. *With reports from Fe Zamora and Christine Avendaño*

LPG price to be cut by ₱1/kilo

By Abigail L. Ho

THE NEW year will be off to a good start for consumers as Petron Corp., Caltex Philippines Inc. and Total (Philippines) Corp. will cut the prices of their cooking gas by P1 per kilogram effective Jan. 1, 2005.

The new prices of Petron's Gasul and Total's TotalGaz will be implemented at 12:01 a.m., while that of Caltex's Caltex LPG will take effect at 6 a.m.

Following the rollback, Gasul can be bought at prices ranging from P370 to P380 per cylinder, while TotalGaz can be bought at between P362 and P372 per tank.

Oil refiner Pilipinas Shell Petroleum Corp. will be implementing a similar price reduction effective 12:01 a.m. of Jan. 4, 2005.

Shell's Shellane will be priced between P370 and P380 per 11-kilogram cylinder following the price reduction.

Petron and Total cited the softening of liquefied petroleum gas international contract prices as their reason for the rollback, the third in less than a month.

Caltex and Shell said competitive market forces prompted them to implement price cuts.

The international contract price of LPG went down by almost $50 per metric ton (MT) from November to December.

NOISE WILL DO
There's reason for vendors of horns and other noisemakers to be happy this year. There's a reported slump in the firecracker business as more and more people, like this family, prefer these horns than the often deadly firecrackers to welcome the New Year.
JOAN BONDOC

GMA: 2005 a year of urgent change

By Juliet Labog-Javellana

LOOKING at 2005 as a "year of urgent change," President Macapagal-Arroyo has spelled out her priorities for next year as President: collecting more taxes and fighting corruption.

Speaking in a press conference in Nueva Vizcaya, Ms Arroyo said 2004 was a year of triumph—which marked her election to a six-year term—and tragedy when hundreds of people in Luzon were killed by killer flash floods earlier this month.

"We must look forward now to 2005 as a year of urgent change," Ms Arroyo said.

To achieve this, she said it was incumbent to improve tax collection and have new tax laws to boost the country's fiscal position.

"I thank Congress for agreeing to end their vacation early so that they can have a special session to pass the tax measures that we need," Ms Arroyo said.

Special session

She has called Congress to a special session from Jan. 5 to 7 next year, a week earlier than the scheduled resumption of session on Jan. 10.

Ms Arroyo called the special session to ask Congress to pass at least the lateral attrition bill which seeks to provide exact "optimum performance" from revenue-collecting agencies by providing incentives and penalties.

The President proposed eight new taxes, aimed at raising P80 billion a year, but only one—the sin taxes on alcohol and cigarettes—has been passed and enacted into law.

Congress also has yet to pass the P907-billion national budget for next year.

Action vs corruption

The President said she needs the 2005 budget to finance her 10-point "pro-poor agenda" which includes more jobs and provision of housing, water and electricity to the poor, among others.

She pledged that next year, she would pursue "executive action to break the culture of corruption."

Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye called on the President's critics to be more patient in demanding results in her programs.

Bunye was responding to the criticism of Pangasinan Archbishop Oscar Cruz that the President has not even started her so-called legacy agenda.

Bunye said the lack of financial resources was hampering the implementation of the President's programs.

This is why, he said, the President has called for new taxes and has implemented fiscal reforms to raise more funds.

"We expect the passage of the tax measures. All of these will have a big impact on resources that we can use for health, education and other projects," he said.

Gov't rejects Joma claim on rights violations

THE GOVERNMENT yesterday rejected an alleged claim by communist leader Jose Ma. Sison that an existing joint agreement on human rights gives the National Democratic Front the right to arrest and prosecute its members deemed to have committed human rights violations.

Silvestre Bello III, chief government negotiator, made the statement as Sison and members of militant organizations were swapping accusations about an alleged hit list by communist rebels.

Bello took exception to Sison's reported statement that the 5-year-old Comprehensive Agreement on Respect for Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law (Carhrihl) "provides for the NDF and the revolutionary forces and people it represents to arrest suspected violators of human rights, investigate them and, if evidence warrants, to prosecute and try them."

"The NDF's position that it has its own judicial and legal systems under a 'People's Democratic Government' is totally unacceptable to the government as this undermines the republic's Constitution which we have sworn to uphold," Bello said in a statement.

Bello said the government's consistent position is that it has the "exclusive right to arrest, prosecute and apply sanctions" against human rights violators.

"The government has not and will never accept the NDF's and Mr. Sison's assertion...," Bello said. *Juliet Labog-Javellana*

Arroyo, Gordon prod GMA on Naia 3 opening

By Michael Lim Ubac

ADMINISTRATION senators yesterday called on President Macapagal-Arroyo to immediately open the Naia passenger terminal 3 to show to the world that the country is open for business.

Following her announcement that the so-called fiscal crisis is over, Ms Arroyo should expedite the opening of the nearly-completed terminal, said Senators Joker Arroyo and Richard Gordon.

The lawmakers noted that although the facility was taken over last week by the government, transportation officials announced that it could begin operating only in June 2005.

"It is important to make use of the facilities that are available to us now to encourage trade and tourism... This will attract investments to create jobs and generate further growth in our economy," Gordon said.

Arroyo lauded Malacañang for expropriating the Naia 3, saying the move had strengthened the justice system in the country.

"The President's decision to expropriate Naia 3 is long overdue but appropriate," said Arroyo.

The maverick senator said that the terminal 3 expropriation should be an abject lesson for those who would, in the future, enter into contracts with the government with intention to defraud.

"The Supreme Court has the duty to void them if proven, because if not, who will?" he said.

He explained that President Arroyo's decision "blunts the unwarranted criticism that the Supreme Court unduly interferes in contracts entered into by the government with the private sector."

Arroyo added that the Office of the President and the Senate, through its blue ribbon committee, had also declared that the facility's contract was "fraudulent and therefore null and void."

Gordon welcomed the takeover of the facility, saying it was about time to "operate the million-dollar facility that has remained unutilized in spite of the fact that it is practically finished and ready to operate."

Cops told: Explain bungled case vs 'cybersex king'

By Philip C. Tubeza

POLICE investigators should explain the circumstances that led to the dismissal of the case against a Belgian national who allegedly operated a pornographic Internet site in the country, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez said yesterday.

Gonzalez said officials of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group should also explain their admission in a television interview that they lack evidence to pin down Belgian Roland Thys, who allegedly owned a "cybersex" den in Barangay Malabanias in Angeles City, Pampanga.

"The CIDG appeared on television and said that the evidence was really lacking. Many people saw it and they should explain that further," Gonzalez said.

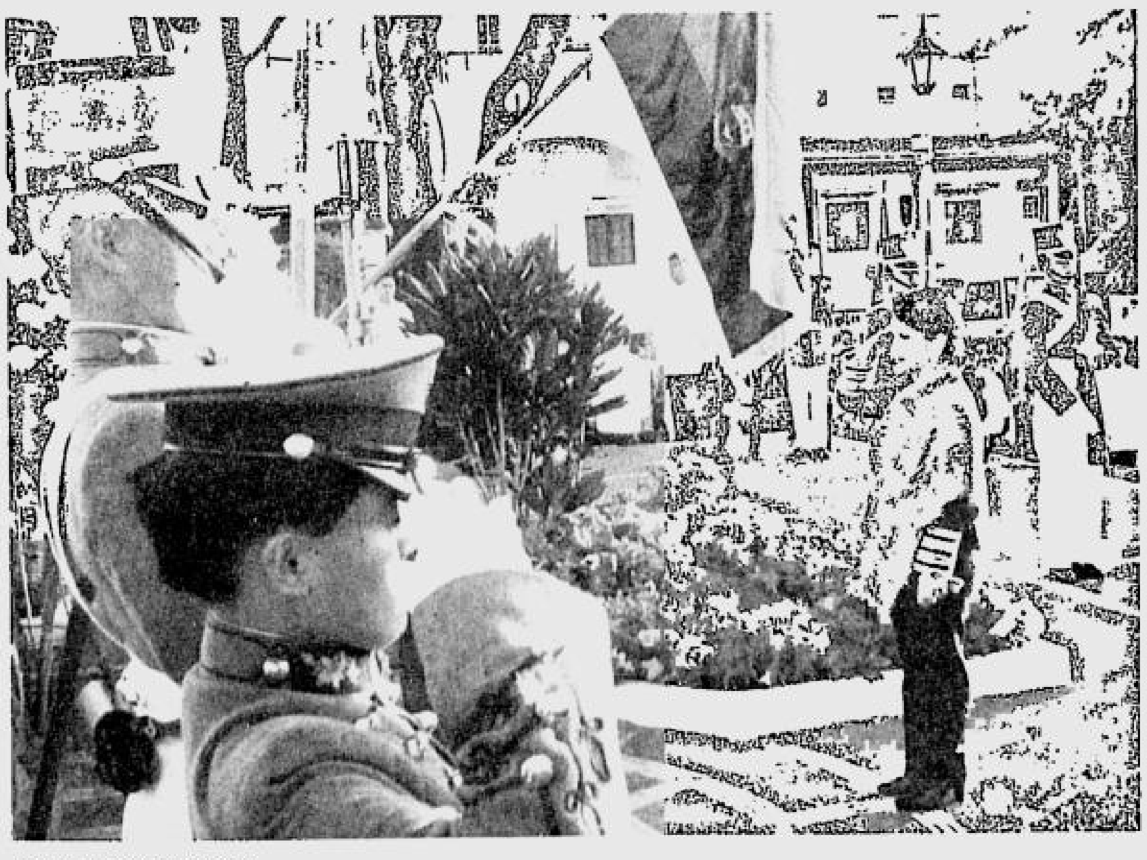
Sen. Jamby Madrigal, who exposed Thys' Internet porn site and involvement in online trafficking of women and children, angrily barged into PNP's Camp Crame headquarters on Wednesday.

The senator vented her ire on state prosecutors Stewart Allan Mariano and Jose Dumangas, who dismissed the CIDG complaint against Thys for "insufficiency of evidence."

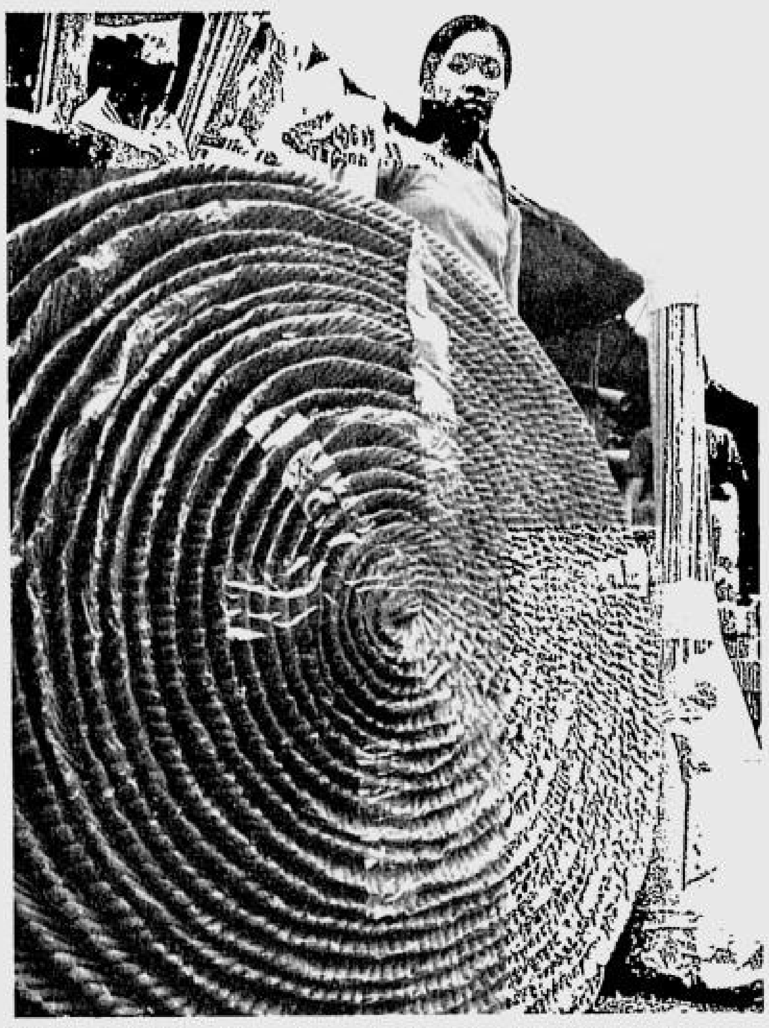
However, Gonzalez said that Madrigal's outburst happened without her knowing all the circumstances in the case, particularly the lack of evidence gathered by the police.

Nevertheless, Gonzalez said he had ordered Mariano and Dumangas to submit a written explanation why the case against Thys was dismissed.

CIDG agents raided Thys' cybersex den on Oct. 4 and rescued at least 15 girls, aged between 15 and 23, who were found in five studios there. But on Nov. 2, Mariano and Dumangas dismissed the complaint against Thys.



RIZAL DAY RITES
President Macapagal-Arroyo executes a salute before a monument of national hero Jose P. Rizal at the Rizal Park in Baguio City Thursday as part of rites held in observance of the 108th anniversary of the hero's execution.
TOOTS SOBERANO



THIS Judas belt and other things that go bang await buyers in Cubao, Quezon City, ahead of tonight's New Year's Eve festivities. Vendors reported poor sales due to the bad economy but police, not taking any chances, issued warnings to would-be "bombers" anyway. JOAN BONDOC

Safety is PNP catchword for tonight's fest

By Christian V. Esguerra and Ronnel W. Domingo

BE MERRY but be safe.

The Philippine National Police yesterday gave this piece of advice in a last-minute effort to minimize the number of casualties in tonight's firecracker-filled festivities.

"While we're celebrating the coming of the New Year, let us not forget about our safety," said Senior Supt. Leopoldo Bataoil, PNP spokesperson.

Knowing that such reminders often fall on deaf ears, the PNP would make sure the message gets across this time, Bataoil said.

The Department of Trade and Industry announced that fireworks manufacturers were now required to follow guidelines set by the Bureau of Products Standards.

The DTI said the new standards were developed in an effort to protect the public from injuries and properties from destructive fires.

Fires and hospital emergency rooms crowded with firecracker victims have become common every New Year.

The standard, titled Fireworks Classification and Fireworks Specifications, guides manufacturers on the various groupings, construction, performance and labeling of firecrackers and pyrotechnic devices.

The BPS also requires manufacturers to indicate their names, addresses and appropriate warnings and instructions on the packages of their products.

Under Republic Act No. 7183 or the Firecracker Law of 1992, the PNP is responsible for awarding makers of firecrackers and pyrotechnics licenses to operate.

Qualified for such license are Filipino individuals or entities that are registered either with the DTI or the Securities and Exchange Commission.

The measure became necessary after makers of unsafe fireworks were often found to be operating without licenses and lacking the technical knowledge to produce and store such dangerous products.

The DTI gave the following advice to consumers:

- Use only firecrackers that provide the name of the maker, warning labels and usage instructions.
- Do not use prohibited firecrackers such as *pla-pla*, super *lolo*, giant *bawang*, giant whistle bomb, baby dynamite and *kabase*.
- Never attempt to re-ignite or pick up firecrackers that failed to explode.
- Do not alter fireworks in any way.
- Do not light more than one device at a time.
- Do not use fireworks indoors.

GMA eyes US funding for rice terraces' rehab

BAGUIO CITY—President Macapagal-Arroyo is seeking US funding for the rehabilitation of the centuries-old Banaue rice terraces, one of the World Heritage Sites, which have remained in utter disrepair due to years of urbanization and deforestation.

On Monday, the President invited United States Ambassador Francis Ricciardone to visit the world famous rice terraces to open a window for US support for their restoration.

Energy Secretary Vicente Perez accompanied Ricciardone to Battad in Banaue, Ifugao, to launch the electrification of the interior Cordillera community "after 2,000 years of no electricity." Battad hosts the stonewall rice terraces that are shaped like an amphitheater.

The US ambassador was with his wife, Mary, and two daughters when they hiked and climbed the rice terraces of Battad.

Perez told the INQUIRER that the President wants to start empowering the towns before the government starts rehabilitating the rice terraces.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) has included the Banaue rice terraces in its list of World Heritage Sites.

Perez said sustained electricity would eventually lead to literacy, improved health care and economic progress, which are factors to raising local economies.

Ifugao remains one of the poorest provinces in the Cordillera. The province has the highest incidence of poor families at 55.6 percent, according to the National Statistical Coordination Board. NSCB figures put Ifugao's average annual family income at P82,245.

Ms Arroyo was earlier criticized for abolishing agencies that administered the terraces' restoration as part of her cost-cutting measures.

In 2003, the President devolved the terraces' administration to former Ifugao Gov. Teodoro Baguilat Jr.

However, Baguilat, up to the end of his term, failed to generate enough interest from potential donors who would finance the restoration of the ancient engineering marvel which has sustained the ecosystem of the terraces.

"We're pleased that the terraces of Battad are in generally good condition except for some sections affected by landslides. We're very impressed in the long hard work that our ancestors put in that spectacular, panoramic rice terraces," Perez said. *Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Solon pushes trust fund for coco tillers

By Carlito Pablo

ANAKPAWIS party-list Rep. Rafael Mariano has called for the creation of a "genuine small coconut farmers trust fund" to constitute the billions of pesos in coconut levy funds.

Mariano made the suggestion as the legal battle to recover the levy fund from known associates of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos is about to be completed.

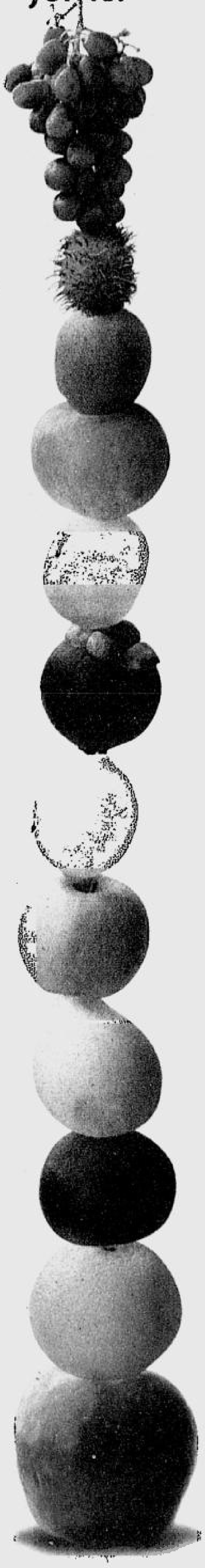
"The establishment of the trust will ensure that the levy fund will be returned to the rightful owners which are the small coconut farmers," Mariano said in an interview.

On Dec. 29, the Sandiganbayan antigraft court rejected motions filed by Marcos associate businessman Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr. to regain control of levy-acquired shares in San Miguel Corp. and United Coconut Planters Bank.

The court, in two previous rulings,, had granted control to the government of 27 percent of shares in SMC and 72.2 percent of shares in UCPB.

The Supreme Court had earlier ruled that the levy monies, which had been collected from coconut farmers by virtue of a presidential decree issued by Marcos, were "public funds."

Mariano said he is filing a bill in January formally spelling out the need for such a trust fund.



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Special session may be a dud

By Cynthia D. Balana and Michael Lim Ubac

WHAT if she called a special session and nobody came?

This could well describe President Macapagal-Arroyo's recent call for a three-day special session of Congress which is in danger of not drawing a quorum.

Two congressmen yesterday said Malacañang should have conducted a head count of Congress members before the President called for the special session on Jan. 5-7 next year.

"This is plain stupidity," said Negros Oriental Rep. Jacinto Paras. "What can a three-day session do when members of the Senate and the House are still on vacation abroad and in the provinces? I'm sure there will be no quorum on the three days."

Muntinlupa Rep. Rozanno Rufino Biazon said he was not sure if majority of the representatives would be able to attend the special session because they had their own appointments.

"There should have been a head count of who would be available during those dates before the special session was called," Biazon said.

But House Majority Leader Prospero Nograles said that forming a quorum would not be a problem since the members of the majority could very well provide this.

He said the special session would also provide the Senate time to pass at least two more tax measures which the lower house had approved before the Christmas break—the Lateral Attrition Bill and the Tax Amnesty Bill.

Nograles said the special session would also speed up bicameral discussions on the General Appropriations Act of 2005 or the national budget.

"The Senate can't meet without the House so the three-day special session will allow the Senate to probably finish the tax measures already approved in the House," he said.

Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr. yesterday welcomed the special session, but doubted if the Senate could muster the numbers to transact business.

He said he was unsure if all of the opposition senators could make it.

"They will attend as long as they are in the country," he said, noting that Sen. Loi Ejercito-Estrada and her son, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, were both in Hong Kong for the knee operation of former President Joseph Estrada.

"As far as I am concerned, those who are here will attend the special session. I don't know who are here, I have yet to make a head count," he said.

So far, only Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile, an acknowledged tax expert and former customs commissioner, would attend the session for sure, Pimentel said.

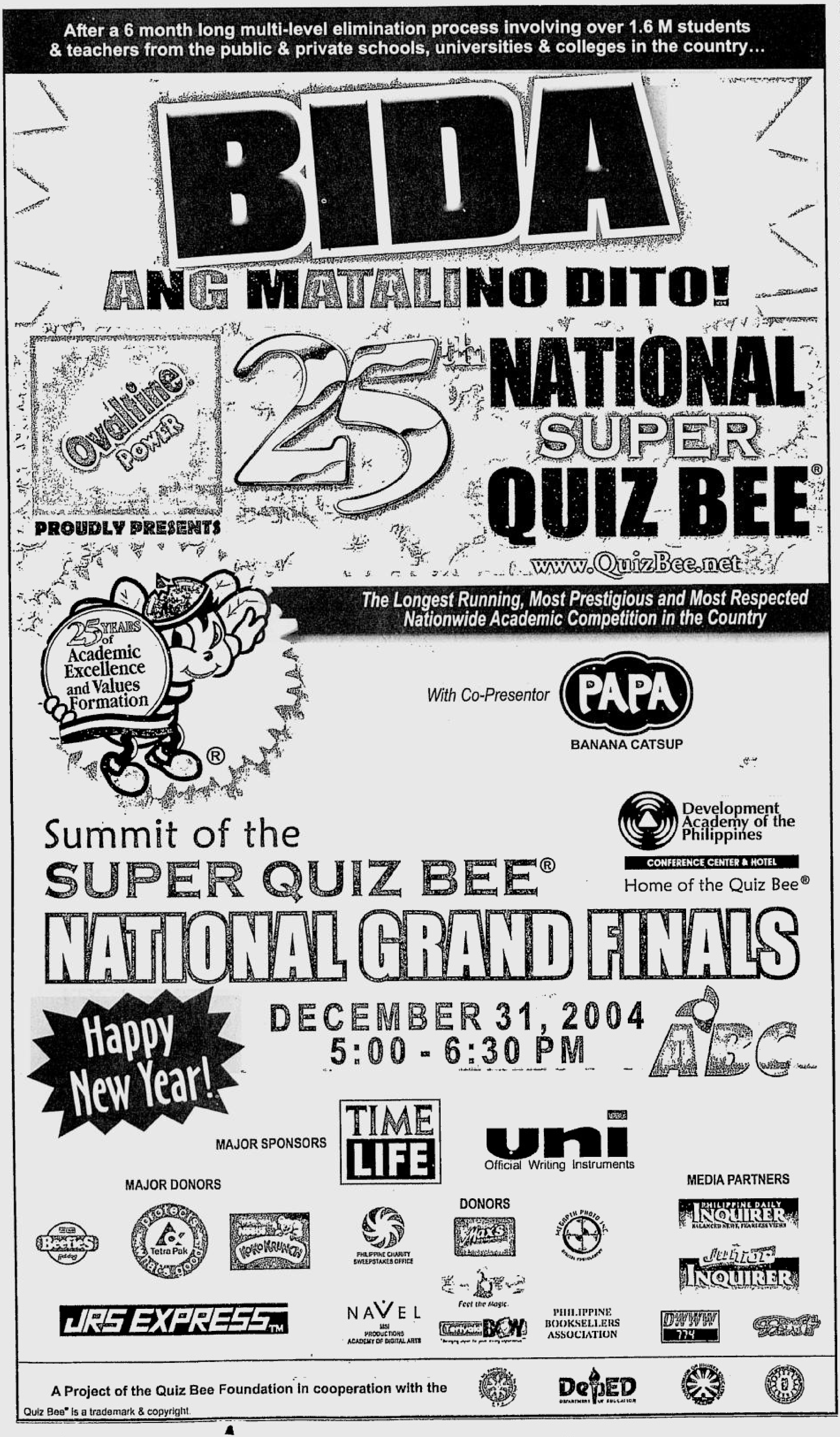
Even members of the administration bloc in the House were questioning what Congress could deliver during the special session.

Rep. Robert Ace Barbers (Lakas, Surigao del Norte) dismissed the special session as a mere "*pampa-pogi*" (face-saving act) and "window-dressing."

"The administration is hoping that calling a special session will be perceived as a demonstration of political will," said Barbers, who has recently become critical of Malacañang.

He said the bills sought to be passed—the lateral attrition and fiscal incentives rationalization acts—were "mere hit-and-miss measures."

"Had the government been serious in raising revenues, it should not have watered down the sin tax bill on cigarettes and alcohol. This is the height of hypocrisy," Barbers said. *With Carlito Pablo*



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Palace to take Jalosjos pardon issue to DOJ

MALACAÑANG yesterday said it would seek the Department of Justice's opinion on whether or not to grant a presidential pardon to convicted child rapist former Rep. Romeo Jalosjos.

This was revealed by Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye following an emotional appeal by Jalosjos' 82-year-old mother for a pardon for her son who has reportedly suffered a stroke.

Bunye said that while he had yet to see a copy of Jalosjos' formal appeal for a pardon, the President usually gets the DOJ to review any such appeals.

A Malacañang source, who asked for anonymity, said the Palace was currently verifying the medical condition of Jalosjos who was reportedly rushed recently to the Makati Medical Center from the New Bilibid Prisons in Muntinlupa City where he is serving two life terms for the rape of an 11-year-old girl seven years ago.

"The President wants to ascertain if he really suffered a stroke before making a decision on a possible reprieve," the source said.

Jalosjos' mother, Angelina, went on national radio Wednesday morning to appeal to the President for a pardon for her son to allow him to seek proper medical treatment and enable them to be reunited in her latter years.

"I am asking President Macapagal-Arroyo to pardon my son who is sick in the hospital where he is being treated for heart problems," said the 82-year-old Angelina who was in tears while making the appeal over RMN radio.

Angelina said she could not leave her home in Zamboanga to visit Jalosjos in the hospital because of her infirmities and they only had been able to talk on the phone. *Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.*

RP, Asia-Pacific boy scouts hold nat'l jamboree

THE BOY Scouts of the Philippines formally opened its week-long 13th National Jamboree on Dec. 27 at the 57-ha Philippine Scouting Center for the Asia-Pacific Region on Mt. Makiling in Los Baños, Laguna.

Some 8,500 scouts and scouters from all over the Philippines and countries in the Asia-Pacific Region have converged for the biggest scouting event of the year, turning legendary Mt. Makiling into a sea of tents and hub of activity.

BSP secretary general J. Rizal C. Pangilinan said all the local boy scout councils have sent delegations, including Quezon, Nueva Ecija and Aurora, the three provinces most affected by the series of typhoons that hit the country recently.

BSP national president Makati City Mayor Jejomar C. Binay said, "The national jamboree is scouting's response to the challenges of the times. We will show the world that we are a people of peace, unity and brotherhood, across lands and seas, and throughout the ages."

President Macapagal-Arroyo, who is also the BSP Chief Scout, sent greetings and enjoined the scouts to participate more actively in nation-building through community service and emergency preparedness.

The President commended the scouting movement saying, "May your dynamic resolve and unified spirit serve as a source of hope and inspiration to other young people."

With the theme, "Scouting: A Brotherhood for Peace and Unity," the jamboree aims to lift cultural and ideological barriers among scouts as a path to peace and unity and to understand the importance of balancing development and ecology through various challenges and adventures.

Alleged smuggle attempt foiled

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—A Korean company has been put on the watch list of suspected smugglers here after the Subic anti-smuggling task force on Tuesday foiled an alleged attempt by the firm to spirit highly dutiable electronics equipment out of this port.

Maj. Gen. Jose Calimlim (ret.), task force head, identified the company as Raiden International Trading Corp.

He said task force members seized a container van carrying electronics equipment consigned to a Minda Valenzuela, said to be the common-law wife of a Korean businessman.

Calimlim said the electronics equipment had been misdeclared as two used Mitsubish Delica vans each worth $350, or P19,698, and automotive spare parts.

Customs records identified the shipper as Kunjang Trading Co. of Iksan City in Jeonbuk, South Korea. The shipment left Korea for the Philippines on Nov. 3, 2004.

Calimlim said that according to the bill of lading, aside from the two used vans, the container van also held 55 packages containing automotive spare parts like bumpers, spoilers, rear view mirrors, headlights and engine supports.

"But outside of the dilapidated vans, there were no such spare parts. The vans instead were full of sophisticated speakers, new television sets, a huge high-definition TV monitor, modern electronic massage equipment, and audio and video amplifiers," Calimlim said in a report. *Allan Macatuno, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

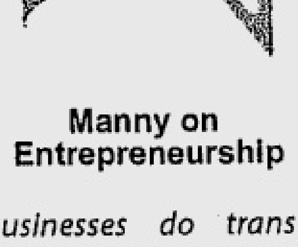
The Entrepreneurial New Wave @ SMART

Looking Back at the SMART Entrepreneurial Program '04

For the thousands of students so far who have attended SEP, theirs is a future reclaimed. Once facing a bleak set of job prospects upon graduation, they are now armed with the knowledge they need for successful entrepreneurship.

The SMART Entrepreneurial Program is the significant project of the year, with far reaching benefits down the line for the entire country. Its mission: to provide alternative solutions for the growing number of unemployed youth in the country. Entrepreneurship is encouraged as an economically viable activity that will generate jobs downstream. Even the President of the Philippines is aware that only through the rapid growth and success of small and medium enterprises can our country solve our economic dilemma. SMART understood this and chose to be a part of the solution. Through SEP it has been spreading the good news that there is an alternative to the lack of employment. Entrepreneurship is the answer, and SEP is the way.

To close 2004, Boy Martirez, Head of Personal Communications & Mobile Services of SMART, reflects on the success of the SMART Entrepreneurial Program (SEP) since it was launched in June. "From its conception, SEP has visited a number of schools around the country and inspired thousands of students bringing a message of hope to all who are in need of an alternative to employment. We will continue to tour the country and touch more young people, planting the seeds for tomorrow's entrepreneurs."



Manny on Entrepreneurship

"Businesses do transform societies. They do not only shape our physical and virtual worlds, but also create new needs, new hopes, and new dreams."

-- Manuel V. Pangilinan,
PLDT and SMART Chairman

It's not just about the innovations we bring...

It's about the opportunities we provide.

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‘This is not a time to be happy’

From page A1

planade said. “The fireworks planned are best reserved for some other, more appropriate occasion in the future.”

The wealthy republic of 4 million was not hit by the tsunamis, but almost 300 locals who were in affected areas around the Indian Ocean were either missing or have yet to be contacted. Three Singaporeans have been confirmed dead.

The Thai government ordered all official agencies to stop celebrations, including those planned for the New Year.

A big countdown party in Bangkok that was to have been attended Friday by Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra and a slew of celebrities — including tennis stars Maria Sharapova and Venus Williams — has been canceled.

4-nation relief coalition

The United States, India, Australia and Japan have formed an international coalition to coordinate worldwide relief and reconstruction efforts.

“We will prevail over this destruction,” US President George W. Bush said.

Well over a million people have been left homeless.

“We’re facing a disaster of unprecedented proportion,” said Simon Missiri, a top Red Cross official. “We’re talking about a staggering death toll.”

“Villages have been washed away,” said Rod Volway of CARE Canada, whose emergency response team was one of the first into Indonesia’s northern Aceh province, the worst-hit area with more than half of known deaths.

“This isn’t just a situation of giving out food and water. Entire towns and villages need to be rebuilt from the ground up. Some areas have yet to be reached,” he said.

As the world pledged $220 million in cash and sent a flotilla of ships and aircraft laden with supplies, international relief agencies relief operation battled with the enormity of their task.

Death count

● Indonesia	79,940
● Sri Lanka	24,743
● India	7,330
● Thailand	2,394
● Somalia	114
● Myanmar	90
● Maldives	69
● Malaysia	65
● Tanzania	10
● Bangladesh	2
● Kenya	1

Numbers based on government and health officials. Numbers of injured were not available for all countries affected, but are expected to exceed the number of dead. *AP*

“As many as five million people are not able to access what they need for living,” said David Nabarro, head of a World Health Organisation (WHO) crisis team.

Many villages and resorts are now little more than mud-covered rubble, blanketed with the stench of corpses after the 9.0-magnitude underwater quake off the Indonesian island of Sumatra triggered the tsunami. Thousands of bodies rotting in the tropical heat have been buried in mass graves.

‘We feel like dogs’

Authorities predict a second round of deaths among those who survived Sunday’s monster wave from diseases such as dysentery, cholera and typhoid fever caused by contaminated food and water.

Survivors in Aceh complained aid was only trickling in despite a mountain of supplies stacking up at the local airport. Aid officials blamed poor coordination with the military.

“There’s no information. Just what you hear on the street. The coordination is very bad,” said Banda Aceh resident Zulkarnaen, 36.

Hungry crowds jostling for aid biscuits besieged people delivering them in the town, so some drivers dared not stop.

“Some cars come by and throw food like that. The fastest get the food, the strong one wins. The elderly and the injured don’t get anything. We feel like dogs,” said Usman, 43.

Growing frustration

In Sri Lanka’s worst-hit area Ampara, residents ran things themselves, going around with loudspeakers, asking people to donate pots and pans, buckets of fresh water and sarongs.

“The government has done nothing for us so far,” said shopkeeper Mohammed Tamir, who lost a wife and daughter.

Indonesian aircraft dropped food in isolated areas along the western coast of Sumatra.

“Frustration will be growing in the days and the weeks ahead,” said UN emergency relief coordinator Jan Egeland.

Hospitals overwhelmed

Hospitals are overwhelmed by the injured—an estimated 100,000 or more.

The United Nations prepared what could be its largest appeal for donations to cope with its biggest, costliest relief effort.

US President Bush said a US pledge of $35 million was just a start.

The Pentagon is sending an aircraft carrier group to Sumatra and another group including a helicopter carrier was headed for the Bay of Bengal.

$14B needed

The financial costs, estimated at up to $14 billion, are tiny relative to the human suffering. Japan’s 1995 Kobe earthquake killed 5,000 but cost $132 billion.

The strongest earthquake in 40 years and the unprecedented tsunami it triggered kept nerves jangling in the region.

India issued fresh alerts for all areas hit by the killer tsunami, prompting a panicked exodus from coastal areas, and in the Andaman and Nicobar islands, near the epicenter of Sunday’s quake, police said aftershocks could cause high waves and evacuated hundreds of residents from some coastal areas.

But there were no signs of giant waves and the US Geological Survey said it was unaware of any aftershock large enough to trigger a fresh tsunami.

Overnight aftershocks in Indonesia’s Banda Aceh, also near the epicenter, sent people fleeing their homes.

“I was sleeping, but fled outside in panic. If I am going to die, I will die here. Just let it be,” said Kaspian, 26.

In north Sri Lanka, survivors recovering corpses faced a new danger—floating landmines from a long-running conflict.

Sunday’s waves tore relatives from each other’s arms, swept trucks and buses through buildings and flipped boats onto land.

5,000 foreigners missing

Holiday-makers were among those caught by surprise. Nearly 5,000 foreigners are missing, mostly in Thailand.

Officially, only some 200 tourists have been reported killed but some 1,500 Swedes, 1,000 Germans and hundreds of others are reported missing. Dutch, German and Swiss forensic teams flew into Thailand to help identify bodies.

Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand face death tolls in the thousands. Hundreds were killed in the Maldives, Burma, Malaysia and east Africa.

The tsunami was the world’s biggest disaster since a cyclone killed 130,000 people in Bangladesh in 1991.

Former German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who narrowly escaped the devastation while on a Sri Lanka holiday, said it looked like World War II.

“It reminded me of the images from the war that I lived through as a youth. It looked like a bomb attack,” he said.

Food riots

On the streets of Banda Aceh, the main town of Sumatra’s Aceh province, fights broke out over packets of instant noodles that the military dropped from vehicles.

“I believe the frustration will be growing in the days and weeks ahead,” said Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Jan Egeland.

The number of deaths in Indonesia stood at more than nearly 80,000.

The disaster struck a band of the tropics from Indonesia to India to Somalia that not only is heavily populated but attracts tourists from all corners. Throughout the world, people sought word of missing relatives, from small-town Sri Lankan fishermen to Europeans on sand-and-sun holidays.

On hundreds of websites, the messages were brief but poignant: “Missing: Christina Blomee in Khao Lak,” or simply, “Where are you?” *INQUIRER wires*

Confusing . . .

From page A1

toll—more than 80,000—that can at best be described as a guesstimate.

With counting methods varying and bodies going into the ground in Indonesia before being officially tallied, the full toll may never be known.

Meticulous

In India, local health, police and revenue officials are keeping meticulous records of every death in schoolbook-like registers of five columns. One column is for the victim’s name, followed by age, parents’ name, address and two identifying marks. A photograph is taken of each body.

Vastly varying tolls during the initial days of a disaster are normal.

After the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, the feared toll of 10,000 came down to 3,200. The reported toll of 100,000 in the 2001 earthquake in western India was officially put at 13,000.

Confusion often arises because many people are counted twice in the initial chaos.

Wailing at the morgue

But the Indian government’s macabre bookkeeping has allowed it to provide unambiguous if highly conservative statistics of Sunday’s tragedy.

At the morgue in the Indian coastal town of Cuddalore, Dr. S. Narayanswamy announced on the public address system to waiting crowds outside: “There are four ladies and a boy of five years, or is it eight years, here. Please come and identify.”

A man and a woman came in hesitatingly, looked at the dead boy’s face and shook their heads. They were asked to leave and the next couple walked in and erupted into wails, beating their chest, rolling on the ground.

Confusing tallies normal

Within moments, a tag of stiff cloth with a number was attached to the body’s arm and the official toll went up by one.

The illiterate parents affixed their inked thumb impression on a form that entitled them to a death certificate and government compensation.

In Indonesia, an unwieldy archipelago of 13,000 islands and saddled with a chaotic bureaucracy, the task of counting the bodies has been frustrating. Cultural differences and geographic isolation of some regions have compounded the problem.

“The confusion on counting the bodies is normal now because the data have been from different sources,” said Purnomo Sidik, national disaster director at the Social Affairs Ministry.

Different tolls

He said the biggest problem was getting accurate data from a region where much of the province’s infrastructure was destroyed and local governments have ceased to function.

“It should be centralized in one office. But the reality is that it is not easy to count the bodies in these areas,” he said.

It has been a dozen years since Indonesia undertook a census, and in remote regions the population count may be even less accurate because many villages keep scant written records of births and deaths.

Phone calls to military, police, the National Disaster Management Center and government ministers produce different death tolls in Sri Lanka, a small tropical country of 19 million people.

Accurate count impossible

Rapidly climbing death estimates from the earthquake-generated waves that struck a dozen countries are likely to be highly inaccurate for some time, despite the best efforts of aid officials to nail them down, experts said.

Because so many nations were struck, with such long, populous coastlines, an accurate count of the dead is nearly impossible. Communications from some areas are still out.

Hotel registers

Also, experts explained, inhabitants of coastal villages and urban waterfront slums were usually subsistence fishermen and farmers who were the least likely to be counted by census takers. The only records of tourists swept away were likely to be hotel registers, which may themselves now be on the ocean bottom. *AP, New York Times*

A ma’s dilemma, other tales of tragedy

From page A1

20-month-old baby Blake when she realized she could not save them both.

“I knew that if I held on to both, we would all die,” Searle said. “I pleaded with a woman to take hold of Lachie. When we saw her later, she said, ‘I’m really sorry I had to let go of him’.”

The father, Brad, watched the horrific drama from the balcony of their first-floor room where he had gone to get a diaper for the baby.

“It was the most horrible time of my life,” he said.

Miraculously Lachie, who cannot swim, was able to cling to a pole in the hotel lobby, keeping his head above water until the raging seas subsided.

It took the parents hours of frantic searching to find Lachie, who was in the arms of a security guard.

Guided by a snake

BANDA ACEH, Indonesia—An Indonesian woman in Aceh province recalled swimming to safety with her neighbor’s young twins on her back by using a giant snake to guide her through the floodwaters.

Riza, a 26-year-old clothes seller, initially watched helplessly as the tsunami swept in to destroy her home.

“Thousands of people were screaming hysterically and were panicking as they saw the water rise higher than their houses,” Riza said.

As she was swept out of her house, she was dragged toward her badly injured neighbor, who was struggling to hold on to her 9-year-old twins.

“Please save my twins, just let me go, as long as they’re safe,” a tearful Riza recalled the mother saying.

Riza grabbed the twins and placed them on her back. As she struggled through the torrent, she saw a snake as big as a telephone pole gliding left with the current of the water and toward what turned out to be a makeshift bank.

“Strangely I felt no fear,” Riza said, adding she followed the snake to safety.

The twins suffered severe bruising and other injuries from being battered, but they too were safe. There was no word on the fate of their mother.

Surya Darmar, 35, grabbed two of his children, his wife took their third, and they bolted from their house outside this town after seeing people running and shouting “Get out! Get out!”

But they could not outrun the monstrous wave that had traveled at speeds of up to 500 km per hour.

“The water was just too strong,” said Darmar. “I held my children for as long as I could, but they were swept away.” His wife and the other child also disappeared. He got hold of a piece of wood and drifted until he smashed into the roof of a shop.

“My life is finished. All I can do is to leave it to Allah,” Darmar said.

Nightmares keep coming back

PENANG, Malaysia—Killer tsunamis are coming again, over and over, in the nightmares of children who survived the waves which swept them from their homes or picnics on Malaysia’s Penang island.

Rahibah Osman’s 11-year-old son, Mohamad Fikri Rahim, who was caught by ferocious waves “as high as coconut trees and blackened with mud,” has troubled dreams in Penang General Hospital.

He cries in his sleep and shouts, “No, no!” his mother said.

“I don’t know what he’s talking about, but when I ask him, he starts to cry,” she said.

Mohamad was covered in mud when he was rescued after waves struck their village about a kilometer away from the beachfront.

Never to the sea again

NAGAPATTINAM, India—Four orphans, who lost their relatives and belongings when the furious ocean swept away their fishing community on India’s southern coast, swear they never want to see the sea again.

“I am scared of the sea,” says Maghadevi, 13. “I never want to see it again. Even if they give me a free house on the beach, I shall not take it.”

Maghadevi and her three brothers, aged 15, 10 and 8, are the only ones left of a once thriving family.

Their father, mother, grandmother and two sisters aged 3 and 2, all perished in the tsunami waves.

20 hours up a tree

TAIPEI—A 6-year-old girl from Taiwan, Yeh Chia-ni, vacationing with her parents in Phi Phi island, clung to a coconut tree for more than 20 hours to escape the deadly waves.

“I waited until the morning. I was thinking my daddy and mommy would come and rescue me,” the girl told Taiwan reporters.

Her mother is one of two people from Taiwan missing in Thailand.

Yeh suffered injuries in her arms and legs. She also had six stitches in her forehead.

Undaunted by deaths

PHUKET, Thailand—Despite the disaster, some determined tourists arrived in the devastated Thai resort island of Phuket on Wednesday.

“Our friends think we’re mad,” said Englishman Paul Cunliffe, an engineer from Manchester, as he sipped what looked like a gin and tonic on a short, lonely flight from Kuala Lumpur.

“We love the place that much and we thought we would take the risk.” *Inquirer wires*

RP sending forensic team to Phuket, docs to Sri Lanka

From page A1

be needed because they will have to document the remains and, also, the Thai authorities, it’s in their culture to give their dead a proper burial,” Asuque said at a press briefing.

Bodies in freezers

“They need forensic experts to document the remains so that the proper burial can be made.”

Asuque said that part of the team’s mission would be to help facilitate the identification of the 16 fatalities whose bodies were recovered in Phuket and whose names sounded Filipino.

“We need foreign experts to catalogue the fatalities’ fingerprints and special features, among others, so they could be easily identified by their relatives [even after they’re buried],” he said.

Filipino-sounding names

The list of fatalities with Filipino-sounding names included Andees Barona, Mariana Barona, Barrera Juan, Carlos Barong, Eileen Chan, Sesilvia Bargoa, Flona Gallan, Feri Cornelia, Giner Salello, Giovanni Cabrera, Ilse Panaino, Katrin Lorente, Major Tomas, Maria Novello, Mary Tanagtong and Sevrine Patruno.

Between 70 and 120 Filipinos are based in Phuket, working as musicians, hotel staff and diving instructors.

Lone fatality so far

Officials said that so far Tan, 19, a Biology sophomore student at the Ateneo de Manila University, remained the only fatality in the aftermath of the tsunami.

Tan’s father David, holder of a British passport, was also confirmed dead. Her Filipino mother Rosemarie Phi King Tan, and sisters Iris Kriselle and Daphne Meryll, also British passport holders, survived.

Rosemarie Phi King Tan was confined at a hospital in Phuket for minor injuries.

Entertainer Jerwin Sedillo and seaman Joselito Balbutin, who were earlier listed as missing, had been accounted for by the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration as “alive and safe,” Asuque said.

Sixteen new names were added to the list of missing persons. They were Estelita Sales, Cruzette Bulaon Cruz, Kathryn Joy Lomadilla, Ria Jane M. Tuzara, Marcela S. Albao, Jasmin Barandoc, Emily Balao, Gerard S. Reyes, Jovita Gomez, aka Wijitra Charoenpong; Ava Angelica Alora, Dario Banua Maniago, Eliza Ferguzon, Gloria Bauarle, Jay William Decayco, Remedios Rico Daniel and Josie Co.

Those earlier identified as missing were Ivy Catherine Tomenio-Terasaka, Alexander Latoza, Alma Gillado, Marcial Ferre, Marian Pasag and Sherlyn Tan.

Coming home

Asuque also said that four of the survivors—sisters Catherine and Pilar Prieto, and couple Marco Sangil and Virginia Cruz, all musicians—were scheduled to arrive in Manila at 6:20 p.m. yesterday.

“We also have a list of 14 survivors but four of them are returning to Manila this afternoon,” he said. “The Prietos are in high spirits. They are OK but Mr. Marco and Ms Virginia would need some assistance in view of the injuries that they sustained during the tsunami in Phuket.”

Like Sedillo and Balbutin, Flordeliza (Dianne) Isla was stricken off the list of missing persons after it was found out that she survived the disaster. Another Filipino, Roselyn Carpio, was added to the old list of 13 survivors.

Those in the old list were the Prieto sisters, Sangil and Cruz, and Beverly Tan, Celeste Panahon, Cherry Panahon, Erwin Raagas, Jovito Masaga, Lorena M. Burlaza, Margaret Ang-Choi, Rosemarie Phi King Tan and Reginaldo Recibio.

Spreading cheer

Filipino entertainers in areas hit by the tsunami said they planned to stay on at their jobs in hopes of bringing cheer to their audiences despite the tragedy.

“As a Christian, I was bothered by the sight of bodies and the destruction wrought by the tsunamis and I don’t feel like entertaining people. But my fellow band members and I have no choice because we are here to work,” said Jeoffrey Palacios, 34, who plays the keyboards in a band in one of the hotels in Phuket.

Palacios, a native of Barangay Poblacion, Bais City, told the INQUIRER in a telephone interview from Phuket that God had been good to him and the many Filipino workers in Phuket.

“God saved us from the tsunami by delaying our departure for Church, which required a drive along the scenic beach route, which was hit by the killer waves,” he said.

Palacios and fellow musician-wife Janith, 36, and their two daughters, Jeojannie, 10, and Angeline Love, 1, were in their staff house, some 500 meters from the beach, when they felt an earthquake.

‘Beauty is gone’

“I refused to believe it was an earthquake at first because in my nine years of working here, I don’t recall having felt an earthquake,” Palacio said.

A few minutes later, he got a phone call from a relative also working in Phuket informing him of what had happened.

“I heard a siren, like an air raid warning, signaling for us to evacuate to higher grounds. And everyone fled to the mountain and the road became very congested as people were all scared of rumors that the tsunami would strike again,” he said.

From the mountain, they saw the extent of the devastation for the first time.

“The beauty was all gone,” Palacios said.

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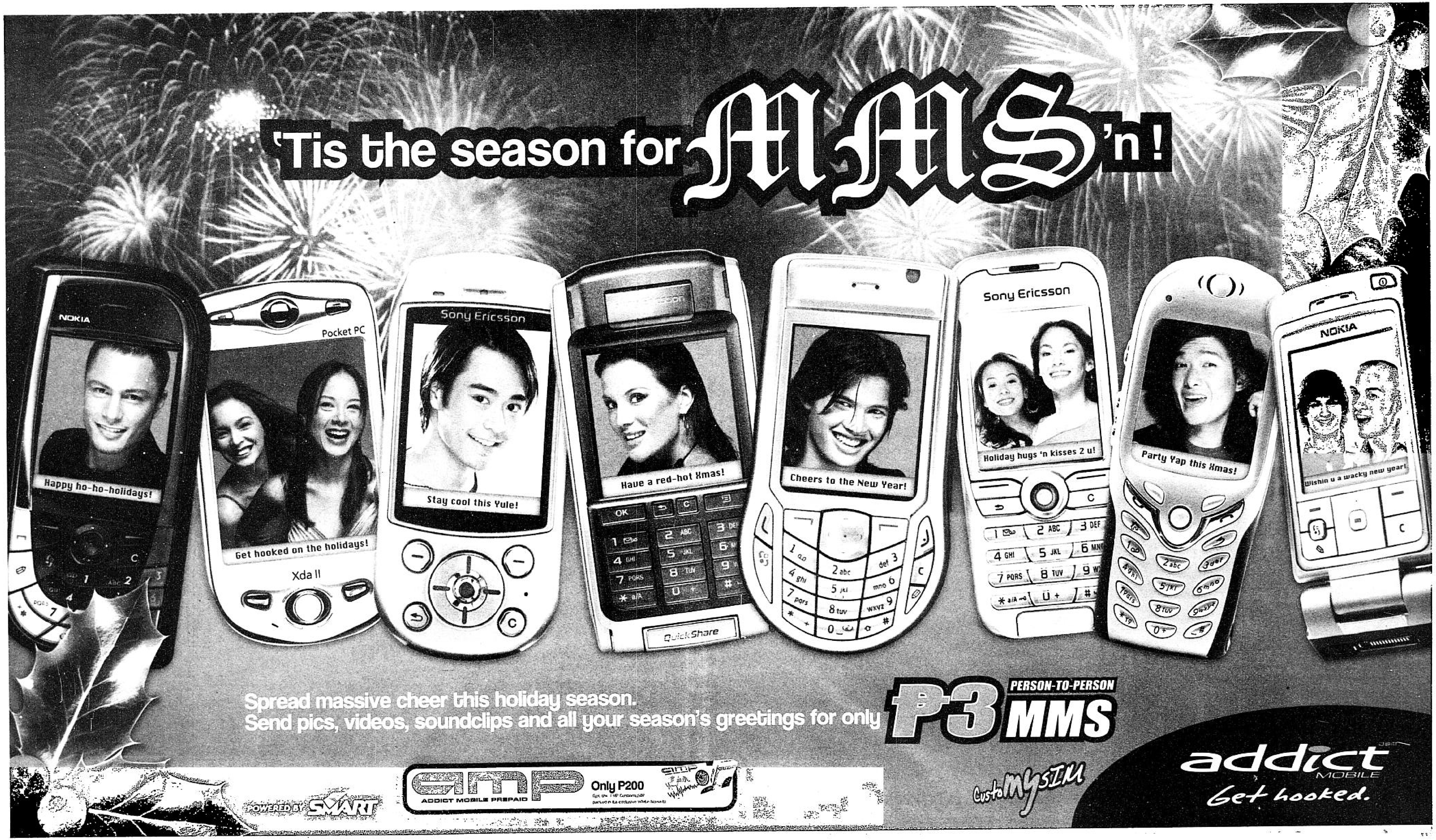
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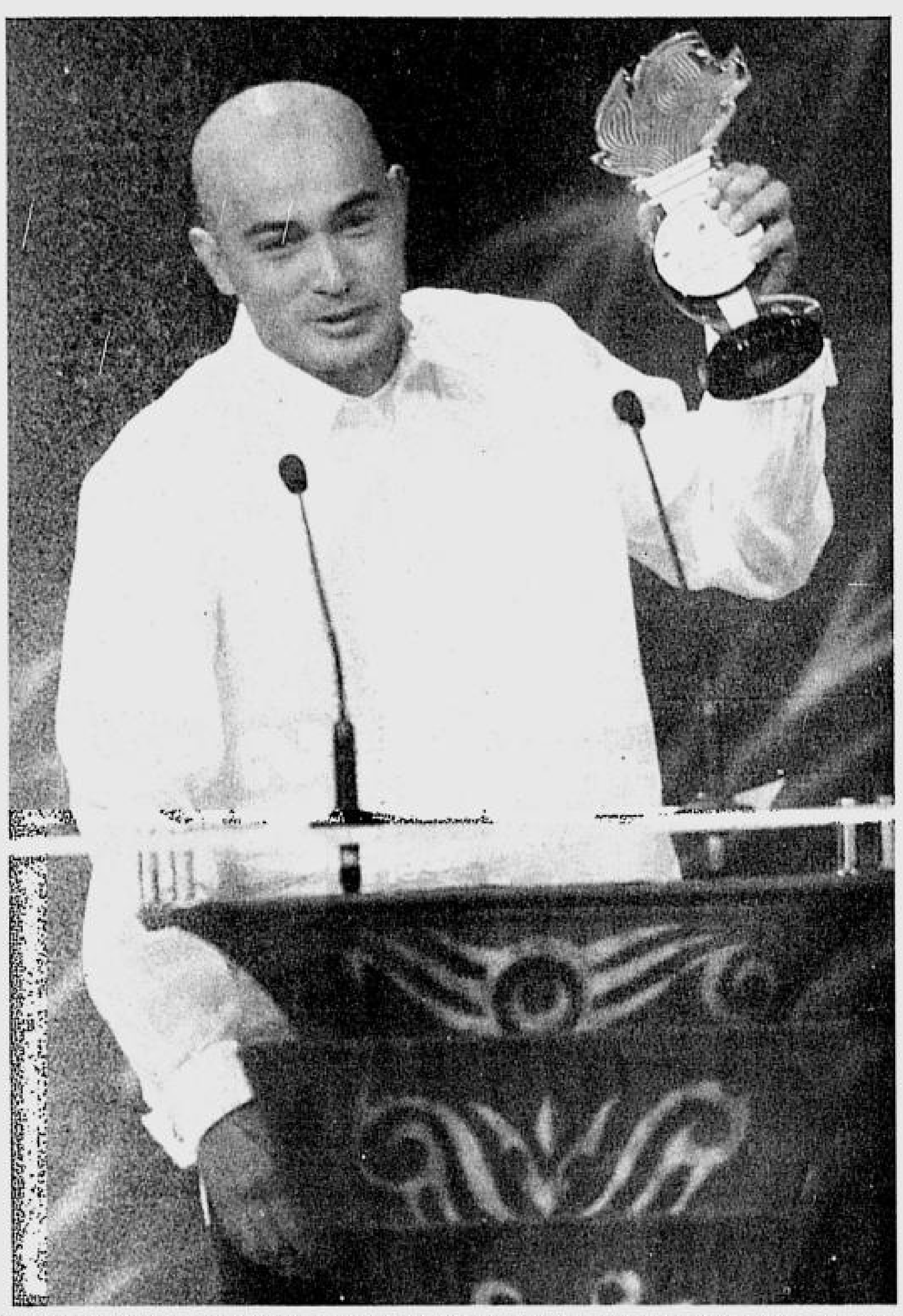


FORECAST by film critics to romp away with the Best Actor trophy, Cesar Montano didn't do too badly with the Best Director award for his one-man opus "Panaghoy sa Suba." RUDY ESPERAS

Stars Vilma, Boyet shine

From page A1

"I've not been making money from producing," Monteverde said, "but I continue to make movies because I love the industry." Four of the eight festival entries were reportedly made by her companies.

FPJ in the house

Perhaps the fact that the program had been dedicated to the memory of Fernando Poe Jr. contributed to the somber atmosphere.

Elizabeth Poe received the posthumous "Idolo ng Masa" award for "Da King" of Philippine movies, who died earlier this month.

"I call on the people to not abandon his dream," Elizabeth said, "to continue to fight." Apparently touched, the audience took a few seconds before applauding.

Director Joel Lamangan's fiery acceptance of the Best Picture award alongside Monteverde—in which he ranted against taxes and government's "neglect" of the industry—failed to rouse as much enthusiasm in his listeners.

Producer and festival committee member Espiridion Laxa received a lifetime achievement award. He dedicated it to Vilma Santos and FPJ ... "and to Erap [former President Joseph Estrada]."

"Da King" starred in the first seven films that Laxa made under Tagalog Ilang-Ilang Productions.

Santos, who was also named Best Actress for "Mano Po 3," led the standing ovation for Laxa. The Vilmanians in the hall must have thought their idol was getting another award, as they led the screaming in return.

No teleprompter

Cesar Montano, winner of the Best Director trophy for his CM Films' "Panaghoy sa Suba," won the women's hearts, too. He was the perfect gentleman and escort to his wife Sunshine Cruz, who needed help with her petticoat as they went up and down the stage to receive awards for absent cast and crew members.

The banter among the three emcees—Judy Ann Santos, Jomari Yllana and Marvin Agustin—was light and breezy, although they had to do without teleprompters. This meant they read from cue cards, which kept them from maintaining precious eye contact with the audience.

Young screen love teams Angel Locsin and Richard Guttierez, stars of the TV hit series "Mulawin," and Mark Bautista and Sarah Geronimo, stars of "Lastikman," turned heads, as did reel- and real-life partners Mark Herras and Jennylyn Mercado, who were inseparable.

7 awards each

"Mano Po 3" and "Panaghoy sa Suba" each won seven awards.

Veteran stage and movie actor Cris Vertido bagged the Best Screenplay trophy for "Panaghoy." He was happy, and it showed. "I've been acting for 40 years and never won anything," he said. "I write my first screenplay and I get this."

Santos and De Leon won acting awards for their roles in "Mano Po 3." MAQ Films got the Best Float trophy.

De Leon would admit later that he considered Montano, who played the lead role in "Panaghoy," as his stiffest rival for the award. "I thought it would be him [the winner]," De Leon said.

"A" rating

Rebecca Lusterio, also of "Panaghoy," was cited as Best Supporting Actress. The Cinema Evaluation Board, in giving the movie an "A" rating, earlier singled out the teenage performer as "silent and powerful, full of conviction and charm."

Other winners were Dennis Trillo, Best Supporting Actor for "Aishite Imasu 1941"; Ella Guevarra, Best Child Performer for "Sigaw"; Manny Dayrit, Best Editing, "Sigaw;"

Best Sound Recording, "Sigaw"; Best Musical Score, "Panaghoy"; and Best Visual Effects, Roadrunner Network Inc., for "Lastikman."

Yorac bucks PCGG downgrade

From page A1

fice of the President.

Former Senate President Jovito Salonga, who was the PCGG's first chair, agreed with Yorac that the President did not have the power to make the changes that she reportedly wants to make in the agency as the executive order that created the PCGG was equivalent to legislation.

Salonga said the PCGG was created under Executive Order 1 dated Feb. 28, 1986, just three days after President Aquino came to power following the first people power revolution.

Requires legislation

Since it was a revolutionary government, Ms Aquino both had executive and legislative powers. Thus EO 1 was equivalent to a legislative act, Salonga said in a phone interview.

Any amendment to EO 1, which created the PCGG, therefore requires legislation because the country is no longer under a revolutionary government, he said.

"I do not want to blame the President (for proposing to place PCGG under the DLR) because she is not a lawyer," Salonga said.

The INQUIRER reported yesterday that President Macapagal-Arroyo had placed the PCGG, the agency tasked with the recovery of ill-gotten wealth from the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his cronies, under the Department of Land Reform.

Ms Arroyo reportedly announced the plans during a Cabinet meeting last week.

Rationale

According to a Cabinet source, the supposed rationale for the transfer was that all ill-gotten assets recovered by the PCGG were to be used for agrarian reform projects.

"I don't know what kind of rearrangement this administrative order will effect and so I cannot make an intelligent assessment," Yorac said.

The PCGG was the first agency that President Aquino created when she assumed office after Marcos was toppled.

Aquino also adopted land reform as her administration's flagship program. In 1987, the Department of Agrarian Reform was created to oversee the program.

Executive powers

The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law mandated that all recovered Marcos ill-gotten assets were to go to funding the agrarian reform program.

Salonga said the President cannot invoke her executive powers to remove Yorac as PCGG chair.

"The President does not have the power to do that," Salonga said.

Erap surgery called off

From page A1

derwent a series of medical tests, including magnetic resonance imaging and ultrasound, with costs ranging from P28,954 to P217,161 each.

Application rejected

Estrada's spokesperson, Didagen Dilangalen, claimed the Park View flat, which he called a room, was actually being rented by Caloocan Rep. Macario "Baby" Asistio who accompanied Estrada to Hong Kong last Monday.

An official of the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital here told the Agence France-Presse that Mow, who flew here without the registration required to operate on Estrada, had his application rejected twice by the Hong Kong Medical Council before Estrada arrived for the operation last Monday.

"His application was rejected twice in November and December," said the hospital official who declined to be identified.

Hospital spokesperson Jeremy Low said this was the first time that the hospital has been rejected.

It was understood the HKMC had told the hospital Mow did not meet the requirements for limited registration, which council member Choi Kin said would be given to foreign doctors who come to Hong Kong only for academic purposes or to demonstrate a new technique.

The hospital source said Estrada's team was "working on" getting the license.

The issue has already reached the Chinese government, of which Hong Kong is a special administrative region. Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo has sent Assistant Secretary Susan Castrence to Hong Kong to help convince the Chinese authorities to facilitate the grant of a license to Mow, an orthopedic surgeon from California.

Estrada's Filipino doctor, Larry Jocson, said late last night that if Mow fails to get the license, his Chinese associate, Julian Cheng, would operate on Estrada. Mow will just assist in the operation.

"Mr. Estrada is determined not to leave Hong Kong until he undergoes this operation," he said.

Erap knew?

There is talk here that Estrada had known all along that Mow had been rejected before making the trip after getting the Sandiganbayan to grant him the petition to have the surgery done in Hong Kong despite opposition from prosecutors who charged that he might flee.

But Dilangalen denied this, saying they were expecting the permit to be issued by the time Estrada flew to Hong Kong on Dec. 27.

"We do not see that as a problem. In fact in August, he (Mow) came here to do a major operation," Dilangalen said.

In an interview at the hospital, Mow also denied that the HKMC had thumbed down his application twice, saying that he was only asked to comply with new requirements.

Dilangalen said they were doing their best to comply with "normal Hong Kong processes, whether with the HKMC or the Hong Kong government."

Palace helping

He expressed optimism that the operation would push through long before the Jan. 15 deadline set by the Sandiganbayan for Estrada to return to the Philippines.

He said Malacañang was helping to resolve the issue. The Philippine government has reportedly sent a note verbale to the Hong Kong government to facilitate the issuance of a license to Mow.

In Manila, the chief government prosecutor Dennis Villa-Ignacio said "this development has vindicated our opposition" to Estrada's overseas trip.

"Our position all along is that Mr. Estrada might just use this trip as an excuse to get outside the court's jurisdiction," he said in an interview.

Villa-Ignacio said the postponement has put the Sandiganbayan in a spot.

"It will be hard put defending its resolution" allowing Estrada to leave the country, he said.

Worst-case scenario

"The worst-case scenario is that Mow will ask that the operation be done in the US or in some other country," he said.

Villa-Ignacio said he was "shocked" when he caught a television interview of Mow upon his arrival in Hong Kong in which Mow said he was "actually willing to come to Manila but that it was his patient who was insistent on doing it elsewhere."

He said the Sandiganbayan had granted Estrada's request to leave based on his claim that Mow was "not willing" to do the operation in Manila.

With the interview, there was no more basis for the court's resolution allowing Estrada to leave, said Villa-Ignacio who added that he intended to submit a copy of the Mow interview to the Supreme Court, where the prosecution has a standing petition blocking Estrada's travel.

Defense counsel chided

Villa-Ignacio also castigated Estrada's defense lawyers who he said had not been honest with the court about the problems that Mow would encounter.

If Hong Kong were to stand firm on not giving Mow the license to operate, Villa-Ignacio said Mow should be convinced to come to Manila and do the operation there.

"It's also for Estrada's sake so that his suffering will finally end. We never objected to his operation per se," he added.

Ilocos Sur Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson, the former close friend of Estrada whose explosive revelations of the latter's allegedly corrupt practices triggered the former President's ouster, suggested that Estrada may have known all along about Mow's problem with the HKMC and that it was part of his "strategy."

"He knew he needed a permit but how come he didn't get it first before he asked the court [for permission] to leave?" Singson said.

Gov't an accomplice

Singson, who publicly opposed the idea of letting Estrada leave, suggested that the government may have been complicit with the ex-President's tactics.

"The administration thinks that the country would be peaceful with Estrada out," he said.

Singson's fear is that Estrada would seek refuge in China with which the Philippines has no extradition treaty.

"He says he'll return, I just hope he'll really return. As far as I'm concerned, I did my best to keep him here," he said.

No special treatment

Foreign affairs spokesperson Gilberto Asuque doused speculation that the government was giving Estrada special treatment by sending Castrence, the assistant secretary for Asean Affairs and one of the DFA's top officials, to Hong Kong to coordinate with the authorities "on matters pertaining to the medical needs" of Estrada.

"We would wish to emphasize that we follow the instructions and the order of the Sandiganbayan. We have to uphold the rule of law and the orders of the court. Even the former President is there pursuant to an order of the Sandiganbayan," he said.

Castrence's presence in Hong Kong was "in line with the order of the court to implement that order," he said.

Estrada, who is being tried on major corruption charges at home, arrived in this former British colony on Monday for the surgery accompanied by his wife, a number of relatives and several police escorts as well as Dilangalen.

His son, Sen. Jinggoy Estrada, who is also facing corruption charges, joined him here the other day.

First time

It is the first time Estrada has traveled out of the Philippines since he was placed under house arrest in 2001 on charges of plundering the country of $80 million during his 30 months in office. *With reports from Christian Esguerra, TJ Burgonio and AFP*

Estrada shakes off surgery jitters with few 'Eraptions'

From page A1

"Eraptions," his trademark humor and wit that is believed to have won him the exalted post that he lost ignominiously just 30 months later.

Told by his United States-based surgeon, Christopher Mow, that he would be gaining height after his knee-replacement operation, Estrada, who stands about 5'7" tall, said he was not looking forward to it.

Mow, who will perform the operation on Estrada, explained that the titanium that would replace Estrada's diseased knees would give him added height.

"I don't need that, maybe somebody else needs it," Estrada said with a hearty laugh as reporters from the Philippines interviewed him in his P20,905-a-day hospital room at the Hong Kong Adventist Hospital.

President Macapagal-Arroyo, Estrada's vice president who replaced him after he was ousted by the second Edsa people power uprising in 2001, stands barely 5 feet tall.

While preparing for his surgery here, Estrada has been lashing out at his successor, saying she was afraid of him because he was still hugely popular and quite capable of launching his own people power uprising.

Estrada told reporters he was well-prepared for the operation, having passed the pre-operation tests.

'Perfect from knees up'

"This is the Lord's New Year's gift to me, perfect from knees up," he said with a wink.

"Before you can think of something else, what I mean is that I have a good heart, lungs and other vital organs," he added quickly.

Estrada had complained that his arthritic knees had become so painful that he could barely stand for more than 5 minutes.

"I used to take painkillers but they no longer work," he said, adding that he had been putting off this operation for six years now.

Still waiting

As of press time last night, Estrada was still waiting for the operation, scheduled for 9 a.m. yesterday, to push through. Mow had failed to secure a permit to operate in Hong Kong from the Hong Kong Medical Council *(Story on Page A1.)*

A disappointed Estrada complained that he had already taken the tests and had fasted for the 9 a.m. operation.

Although his knees bothered him, he objected to hospital staff moving him around in a wheelchair.

"It makes me look old," the 67-year-old former leader explained.

Told that he was being described here as a "superstar patient," Estrada addressed the INQUIRER directly, saying jokingly: "I thought you already consider me a has-been as you describe me as an ousted or a disgraced President."

Estrada also took potshots at the ABS-CBN television network, saying he would only give an interview to a rival station because the latter had higher ratings.

Sick man

Malacañang officials merely shrugged off the taunts of Estrada and his latest attack on the President.

"He is a sick man that needs to be healed," said Silvestre Afable III, the presidential adviser on communications.

"We wish that his operation goes well," Afable said.

"Let's not make a big deal out of it. What we want is for his operation to be finished as quickly as possible and that he comes back immediately to the country to face whatever he is facing," Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye told RMN radio.

Afable, presidential political adviser Gabriel Claudio and chief of staff Norberto Gonzales rallied behind the President, denying Estrada's claim that she was "very, very afraid" of him.

"Afraid? No, she's prevailed over more real and daunting challenges as President," Claudio said.

They said the President was capable of crushing any destabilization attempt.

The Malacañang officials said the President's regard for her detained predecessor would not be affected by Estrada's latest outburst.

Policy of compassion

"The policy of compassion stays despite his harsh words," Afable said.

Claudio said he would advise Estrada to put politics out of his mind and concentrate on his surgery.

"For his own benefit, former President Estrada should go into his surgery and process of recuperation with a deeper sense of equanimity, devoid of needless anxiety or aggravation, so that his chances for a successful operation can be maximized. We do wish him a successful operation and a speedy recovery," Claudio said.

Gonzales said Estrada should separate his health problem from politics.

Mocking

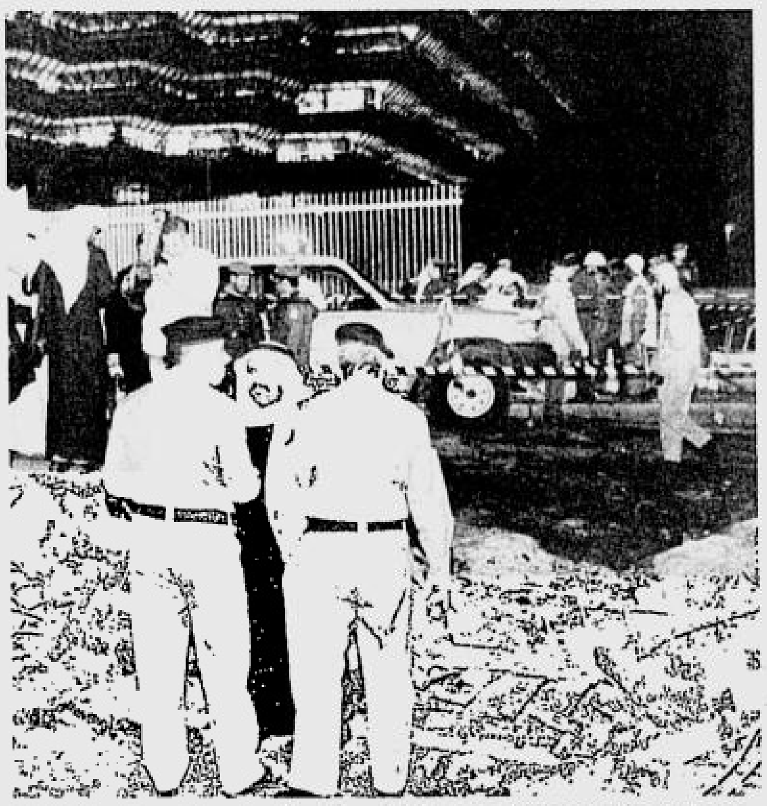
The officials laughed off Estrada's claim that he was capable of mounting a people power movement against the President.

"It's one thing to plan a people power [uprising], it's another thing to execute it," Gonzales said. *With reports from Juliet Labog-Javellana and Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.*

The WORLD

Editor Luverne B. Gueco

Car bombings rock Riyadh



SAUDI police officers look at the debris caused by an explosion near to Saudi Arabia's interior ministry, background, after an explosion in Riyadh late Wednesday. AP

RIYADH—Suicide bombers tried to storm Saudi Arabia's interior ministry and a security unit in the capital Riyadh on Wednesday in what appeared to be the latest brazen strike by al-Qaida in the world's top oil exporter.

An interior ministry statement said members of the "deviant group"—what the government calls al-Qaida—detonated two bomb-rigged cars outside the vast, heavily fortified ministry compound and the security unit, wounding at least 18 people.

It said there were no reports of deaths so far in the huge blasts—the first against a government building since April and the second major militant strike this month.

The attacks sent global oil prices higher, with US crude futures ending up $1.93 at $43.70 a barrel.

"Members of the deviant group detonated a car rigged with a large amount of explosives outside the eastern section of the interior ministry," the statement said.

"At the same time, an explosives-laden car headed toward the center of the special emergency forces. Security forces reacted before it reached the center and those inside the car detonated it more than 350 meters away from the gate."

Six guards at the ministry and "some" civilians were wounded, the ministry said, while 12 people at the security center suffered injuries from glass shards in the second bombing which also wounded "a number" of civilians.

A Reuters reporter said the eastern gate of the ministry compound, which is on a main avenue near other government buildings, was a mass of tangled metal from the blast.

The building was superficially damaged, with some windows blown out. Helicopters hovered above the normally busy area, which was cordoned off by police. The flashing lights of ambulances and police cars lit up the area.

State-owned Ikhbariya television showed a blown up taxi on the main road, with what appeared to be a dead body inside.

Shortly after, police raided a house in the capital and the interior ministry said seven militants linked to the car bombs were killed. It said police also found explosives and weapons.

The attacks bore the hallmarks of previous car bombings in the kingdom which the Saudi wing of al-Qaida has claimed.

They also came three weeks after al-Qaida militants stormed into the US consulate compound in the Red Sea city of Jeddah, taking hostages and killing five people in a daring raid that was the first strike on a Western mission in the kingdom.

The US Embassy in Riyadh urged Americans in the kingdom to be more vigilant after the blasts. "American citizens are advised to be aware of their surroundings, exercise caution, and monitor news reports closely," the embassy said.

Saudi Arabia has been rocked by a surge of Islamic militant violence since May 2003, in which about 170 people have been killed, including Westerners.

The wave of suicide bombings and shootings has been claimed by the local wing of Saudi-born Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida, which is bent on toppling the pro-Western monarchy and driving Westerners out of the birthplace of Islam. *Reuters*

US troops kill 25 rebels in fierce Iraq fight

MOSUL, Iraq—US troops backed by warplanes killed 25 guerrillas in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul on Wednesday after facing a coordinated assault involving two suicide bombs and dozens of insurgents, the military said.

The fighting in Iraq's third largest city followed an overnight attack by insurgents who detonated three quarters of a ton of explosives in a house that police were raiding in Baghdad, killing at least 28 people.

Witnesses in Mosul said the fighting began when a suicide bomber detonated a fuel truck outside a house that has been occupied as a combat outpost by US troops since last month.

Lt. Col. Paul Hastings, US military spokesperson in Mosul, said a patrol responding to the blast was attacked by a second suicide car bomb, and also had to deal with several roadside bombs before reaching the combat outpost.

Around 50 insurgents then attacked the outpost with assault rifles, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades, Hastings said.

"Close air support was called in. Initial estimates are 25 enemies killed," Hastings said.

He said 15 US troops were wounded in the clashes.

The brazen rebel assault illustrated the increasing boldness of insurgents in the city, following a suicide attack on a Mosul base last week that killed 22 people including 18 Americans—the deadliest single attack on Americans in Iraq since the start of the war to oust Saddam Hussein.

Security collapsed in Mosul last month when rebels overran several police stations in the city, 390 km north of Baghdad, and most of the city's police fled their posts.

The US military has conceded it is not in control of some areas and plans to send thousands more troops to the city ahead of Iraq's elections on Jan. 30.

Attacks this week on police and other Iraqi security forces have left dozens dead in a sign that the Sunni insurgency, freshly endorsed by Osama bin Laden, remains potent despite US offensives intended to protect the election.

The Baghdad blast occurred when police entered a building in the westerly Ghazaliya district in response to a call from a neighbor.

An Iraqi interior ministry spokesperson said the call was apparently a trap. "When the police arrived and went in, the house blew up," he said. "It seems to have been a trap."

Six policemen were among the dead and four officers were missing, a ministry spokesperson said. Witnesses saw at least one more dead woman dug from the rubble of nearby houses razed by the massive blast. At least 21 people were wounded.

Neighbors said they had called police after becoming suspicious of a foreign-looking dark-skinned man in the house, which they said had been rented this week and filled with boxes.

"The house was turned into a bomb," a police officer said.

Three houses were razed to piles of bricks and rubble, while half a dozen others were damaged. Entire families were wiped out, neighbors said.

"I saw unexploded artillery shells with red wires taken out of the rubble," said neighbor Mohammed Ali, 35, a taxi driver.

On Monday, an audio tape purportedly from Bin Laden endorsed Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi as the al-Qaida leader in Iraq, and declared holy war on US and Iraqi forces trying to safeguard the election. *Reuters*

Ramsey Clark joins Saddam's legal team

AMMAN—Former US Attorney Ramsey Clark has joined Saddam Hussein's legal team, the chief of the fallen dictator's defense lawyers said Wednesday.

Ziad al-Khasawneh said Clark joined the team after Saddam told his Iraqi lawyer, Khalil al-Duleimi, in a meeting last week to convey his regards to the former US attorney. Clark interpreted the gesture as an attempt to enlist him, al-Khasawneh added.

Clark's law office in New York City refused to comment on the report and said Clark was scheduled to be out of the country until next week.

Clark, who served as attorney general under the late President Lyndon Johnson for three years in the 1960s, is a staunch antiwar opponent who has met Saddam several times over the last 15 years. He was considered a friend of Iraq under Saddam when the United Nations slapped an embargo on Baghdad following its 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Clark met with al-Khasawneh and others on the defense team Tuesday and left the kingdom Wednesday, al-Khasawneh said.

With Clark, the number of Saddam's lead lawyers in the Jordan-based defense team becomes 25, said al-Khasawneh, who has said he was appointed by Saddam's wife Sajida.

The other lawyers come from different countries and include people who have previously taken high profile international cases or are known sympathizers with Saddam's deposed Arab Baath Socialist Party. *AP*

Details of detainees' treatment at Guantanamo Bay emerge

WASHINGTON — Recent legal cases have penetrated the secrecy of the George W. Bush administration's treatment of terrorism detainees, revealing that foreigners who aided al-Qaida can be held indefinitely even if that help was unintentional or evidence of it was produced by torture.

But new legal opportunities for the 550 detainees at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, to seek freedom probably won't produce many releases soon.

Only two detainees have been released by the Combatant Status Review Tribunals the Pentagon set up in response to one of two June decisions on detainees by the Supreme Court. One of the rulings opened the door for foreigners detained as enemy combatants to challenge their imprisonment at the US naval base in Cuba.

With more than 510 hearings completed, the military panels have repeatedly ordered continued detention.

"So far, it's a disaster" for detainees seeking release, said Eugene Fidell, a Washington attorney who specializes in military law. "The due process has been illusory."

Defense lawyers contend the Pentagon has interpreted the ruling too narrowly. Current and former administration officials maintain that the policies in place comply with high court decisions while protecting Americans from terrorists.

In the lawsuits, detainees want federal judges to order the Pentagon to let them have lawyers at the tribunal hearings, see secret evidence against them, and exclude evidence gained by torture or to have civilian US courts hear their cases.

The high court ruling and subsequent proceedings have produced some results in the second half of 2004:

- The Pentagon established the new military reviews of detainees.
- More than six dozen current or former detainees have filed 21 lawsuits seeking either release, millions of dollars in damages for mistreatment, or expanded procedural rights in military trials. All are in preliminary stages, and more lawsuits are expected. *AP*

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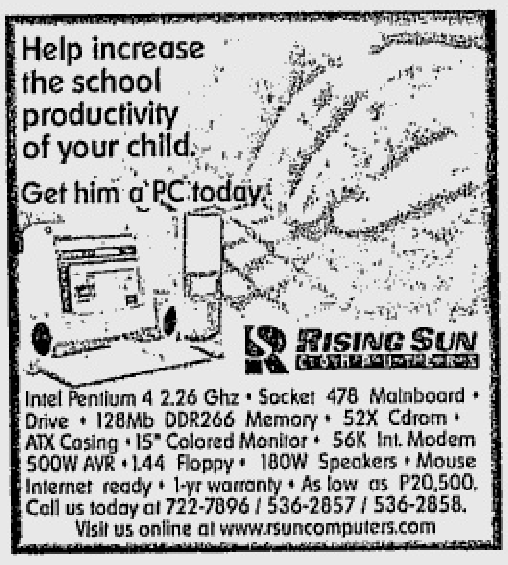

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MGB Approves CAC Social Development & Management Program

Concrete Aggregates Corporation (CAC) finally secures the approval of the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) for its 5-year Social Development & Management Program (SDMP) for its aggregates mining operations in Angono, Rizal. Last 15 December 2004, MGB Director Horacio C. Ramos approved the program in the presence of Engineers Rolly Cruz and Joel Laporga, Acting General Manager and Asst. General Manager of CAC, respectively.

The program, a product of more than a year of thorough study and consultations with LGUs and NGOs provides for the development and implementation of projects which will benefit the community and its residents such as flood control system, water supply system, livelihood programs, and medical assistance programs. This year, CAC starts with the P 1.5 Million Flood Control Project for Barangay San Roque, Angono, Rizal.

Mr. Francisco M. Ortigas III, President of CAC, and prime supporter of the program, firmly believes in balancing progress with environmental protection and community development. As he continues to steer the company to maintain its leadership in the domestic aggregates industry, he ensures that the company shall continually protect the environmental and shall strive to improve the welfare of the residents of the host communities.

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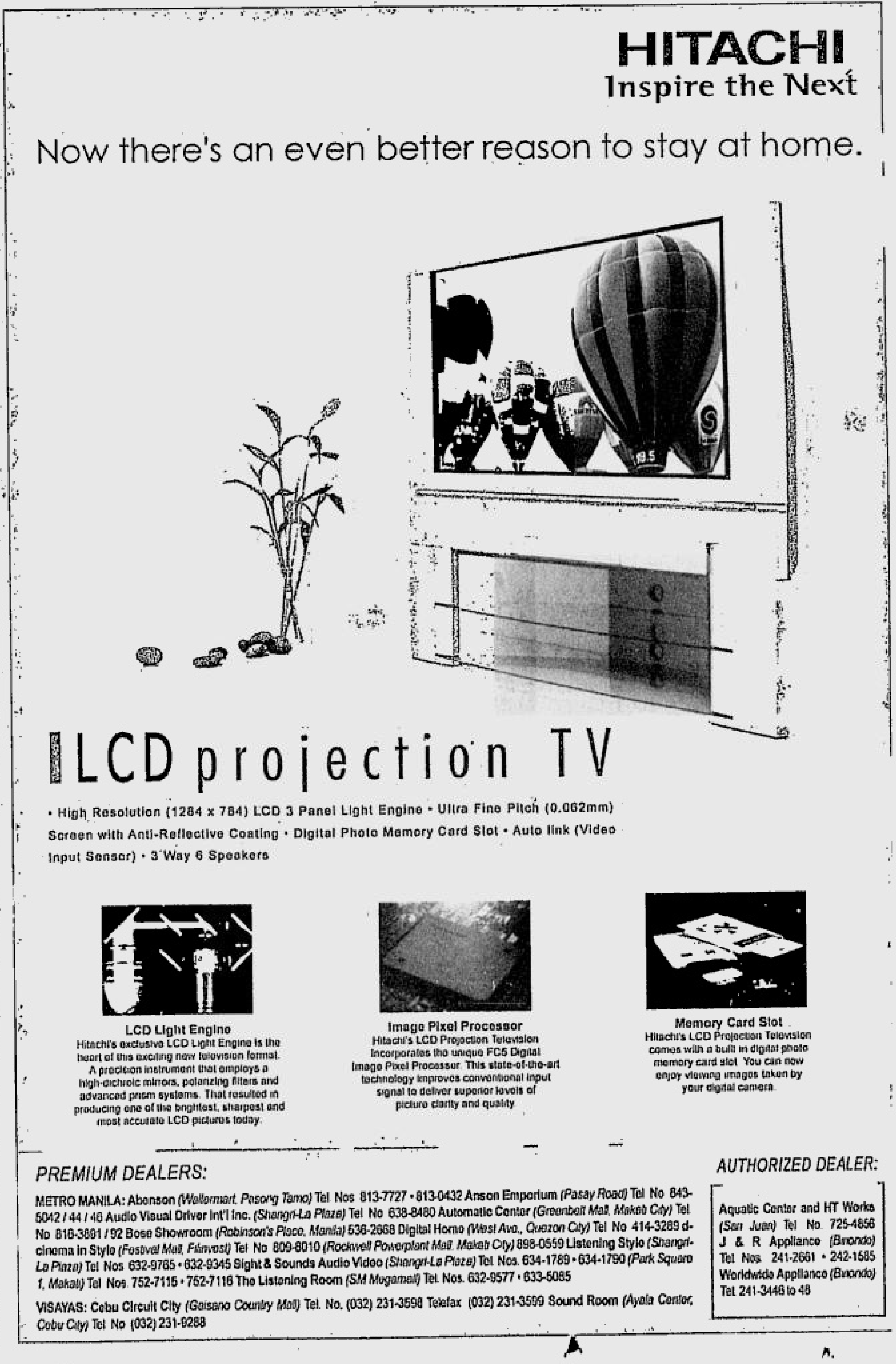

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PLO radicals back Abbas rival for presidency

GAZA—A Palestinian militant group behind some suicide bombings against Israel said on Wednesday it would back a leading proponent of non-violence running in a presidential election to succeed Yasser Arafat.

The endorsement of human-rights activist Mustafa Barghouthi by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine highlighted a political shift after Arafat's death in which other militants have decided to back election frontrunner Mahmoud Abbas, who has condemned an armed uprising against Israel as a mistake.

"We call on all members of the PFLP and the Palestinian people to support and vote for Dr. Mustafa al-Barghouthi," senior PFLP leader Rabah Muhana told a news conference in Gaza.

The PFLP, which has about 2 percent support in opinion polls, is a radical group in the umbrella Palestine Liberation Organization led by Abbas and opposes peacemaking with Israel in contrast with Fatah, the PLO's mainstream faction.

Barghouthi, running a distant second to Abbas in the Jan. 9 election race, is a prominent critic of Israeli army crackdowns in occupied territory but, like Abbas, wants a halt to bloodshed and talks on a Palestinian state co-existing alongside Israel.

Muhana said the PFLP and Barghouthi had agreed on key issues such as stressing a "right of return" of refugees to what is now Israel and rejecting any peace based on 1990s interim deals that did not require full Israeli withdrawal from occupied areas.

ABBAS

Asked about being linked with a group that has killed Israelis in suicide bombings and assassinated an Israeli Cabinet minister, Barghouthi said he disagreed with some PFLP views but its move would foster Palestinian unity after Arafat.

"We will give maximum effort to strengthen the popular (non-violent) nature of the struggle (for statehood). We will seek to unite the vision of struggle through dialogue. "(The PFLP endorsement) can be the start of a new democratic Palestinian coalition," he said.

Political analyst Hani Habib said the PFLP move would improve Barghouthi's showing by attracting a number of undecided voters, although not enough to upset Abbas.

It could also raise fear in Fatah, he said, that Islamists might back an independent like Barghouthi "to at least prevent Abbas from achieving a big victory" that he needs for a popular mandate to rein in militants so he can negotiate with Israel.

Senior Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar, whose group rejected to field a candidate for the election, said members of the group were free to vote—a departure from a general boycott declared by another Hamas leader earlier this month.

"We asked nobody to go (vote) and nobody to boycott it.

Everyone, even Hamas members, is free to participate or not," Zahar said.

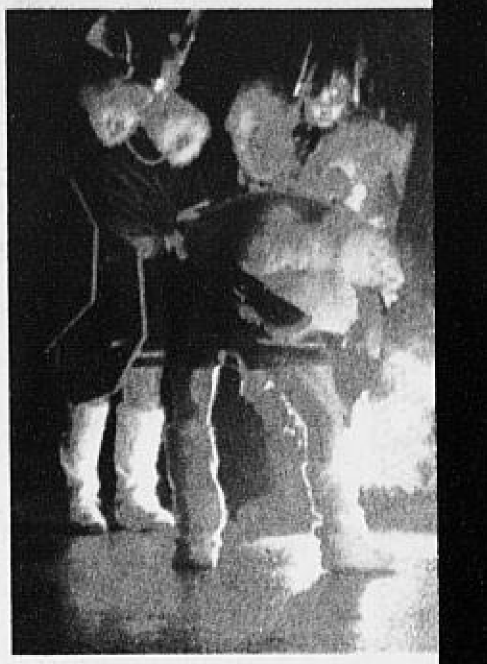
Hamas won some municipal elections last week and may run in parliamentary polls next year.

The Fatah-affiliated al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades say its gunmen will vote for Abbas "to give him a chance" because he wants to root out corruption and carry out democratic reform.

But the Brigades, like Hamas and the PFLP, have resisted Abbas' calls for a truce with Israel, although violence has abated markedly in most areas since Arafat died in November.

Fatah, which nominated Abbas as its candidate, draws around 40 percent in polls followed by Islamist militant group Hamas, which is not contesting the election, at about 20 percent.

Mustafa is a distant cousin of jailed uprising leader Marwan Barghouthi who pulled out of the presidential race this month. *Reuters*



VIKING NEW YEAR

**Men dressed as Vikings prepare to burn
launch pad for the city's Hogmanay (Ne
spectators and people dressed as Viking**

THIS file photo shows Oded Golan in Tel Aviv pointing to the carved Hebrew inscription on an ossuary, believed to have held the bones of Jesus' brother James. Golan was charged with forging a host of biblical relics including the stone casket. AFP

4 antiquities dealers indicted for forged relics

JERUSALEM—Four Israeli antiquities collectors and dealers were indicted Wednesday on charges they ran a sophisticated forgery ring that spanned the globe and produced a treasure trove of fake Bible-era artifacts, including some that were hailed as major archeological finds.

Police said the ring forged what were presented as perhaps the two biggest biblical discoveries in the Holy Land in recent years—the purported burial box of Jesus' brother James and a stone tablet with written instructions by King Yoash on maintenance work at the Jewish Temple.

The forgers "were trying to change history," said Shuka Dorfman, head of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Investigators warned that collectors and museums around the world could be in the possession of fakes, and scholars said museums should re-examine items of suspicious origin. The forgery ring has been operating for more than 20 years, Dorfman said.

Scholars said the forgers were exploiting the deep emotional needs of Jews and Christians to find physical evidence to reinforce their beliefs. "This does not discredit the profession. It discredits unscrupulous dealers and collectors," said Eric Myers, an archeology professor at Duke University in North Carolina.

The announcement of the indictments was made at a joint news conference of the Antiquities Authority and the police, capping a two-year probe. The indictment listed 124 witnesses, including antiquities collectors, archeologists, officials from Sotheby's auction house in Israel and representatives of the British Museum and the Brooklyn Museum.

Dorfman said the Israeli investigators had limited resources, and the scope of the fraud appears to go far beyond what has been uncovered so far. "We discovered only the tip of the iceberg. This spans the globe. It generated millions of dollars," Dorfman said.

The forgers would often use authentic but relatively mundane artifacts, such as a plain burial box, decanter or shard, and boost their value enormously by adding inscriptions, Dorfman said. Once the words were engraved, the forgers would try to recreate patina, or ancient grime, to cover the carvings, the indictment said.

The four men indicted were Tel Aviv collector Oded Golan, owner of the James ossuary and the Yoash tablet; Robert Deutsch, an inscriptions expert who teaches at Haifa University; collector Shlomo Cohen, and antiquities dealer Faiz al-Amaleh. The four are free on bail, police said.

Golan said in a statement Wednesday that "there is not one grain of truth in the fantastic allegations related to me," and that the investigation was aimed at "destroying collecting and trade in antiquities in Israel." Deutsch dismissed the indictment as "ridiculous."

Additional indictments were to be issued in coming days, said Shaul Naim, the chief investigator of the Jerusalem police. A fifth person was mentioned in Wednesday's indictment, but his name was withheld because he has not yet been located, officials said.

The probe began after the Yoash tablet was offered for sale to the Israel Museum for $4.5 million two years ago. Uzi Dahari, a top official in the Israel Antiquities Authority, said in a recent lecture that some of the forgeries were done by an Egyptian artisan who has worked in Israel for the past 15 years. The Egyptian went out drinking in a Tel Aviv pub from time to time and would brag about his exploits, Dahari said, adding that some of the pub-goers alerted the police. *AP*

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a 12-meter long Viking longship on Calton Hill in Edinburgh as the
w Year) celebrations. The festival was attended by thousands of
s from Shetland.

REUTERS

29th human bird flu case in Vietnam

HANOI—A 16-year-old girl from southern Vietnam has become inflected with the bird flu strain that killed 32 people earlier this year and devastated the poultry industry across Asia, a doctor said Thursday.

The girl, from the southern Mekong Delta province of Dong Thap, was in critical condition and on a respirator at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in Ho Chi Minh City, hospital deputy director Dr. Tran Tinh Hien said.

Vietnam has suffered recurring outbreaks of the disease in chicken farms—most recently in southern provinces—since a big wave of infections sickened poultry across much of Asia earlier this year. The virus has jumped to people in Vietnam, where it killed 20, and Thailand, where it killed 12.

The girl from Dong Thap is Vietnam's 29th person confirmed with the disease.

"She is still in critical condition and is being hooked to a respirator," Hien said.

The girl had slaughtered a chicken she brought with her from Dong Thap province to southern Tay Ninh province, where she was visiting her uncle. She developed the disease's typical symptoms of high fever, coughing and breathing difficulties on Dec. 19, said Huynh Tan Kiet of the Tay Ninh provincial Preventive Medicine Center.

Direct contact

Most human cases of bird flu have been traced to direct contact with sick birds. The virus is not believed to have mutated into a form that can easily be passed among people.

The girl was admitted to a clinic in Tay Ninh province late last week, before being transferred to the hospital in Ho Chi Minh City on Dec. 26, Kiet said.

None of the uncle's eight family members have developed bird flu symptoms, and the man's house has been disinfected, he said.

Health officials

Heath officials were still investigating how the girl contracted the disease.

Vietnam's last previous human case of bird flu was a 14-month-old boy who died in September in Hanoi.

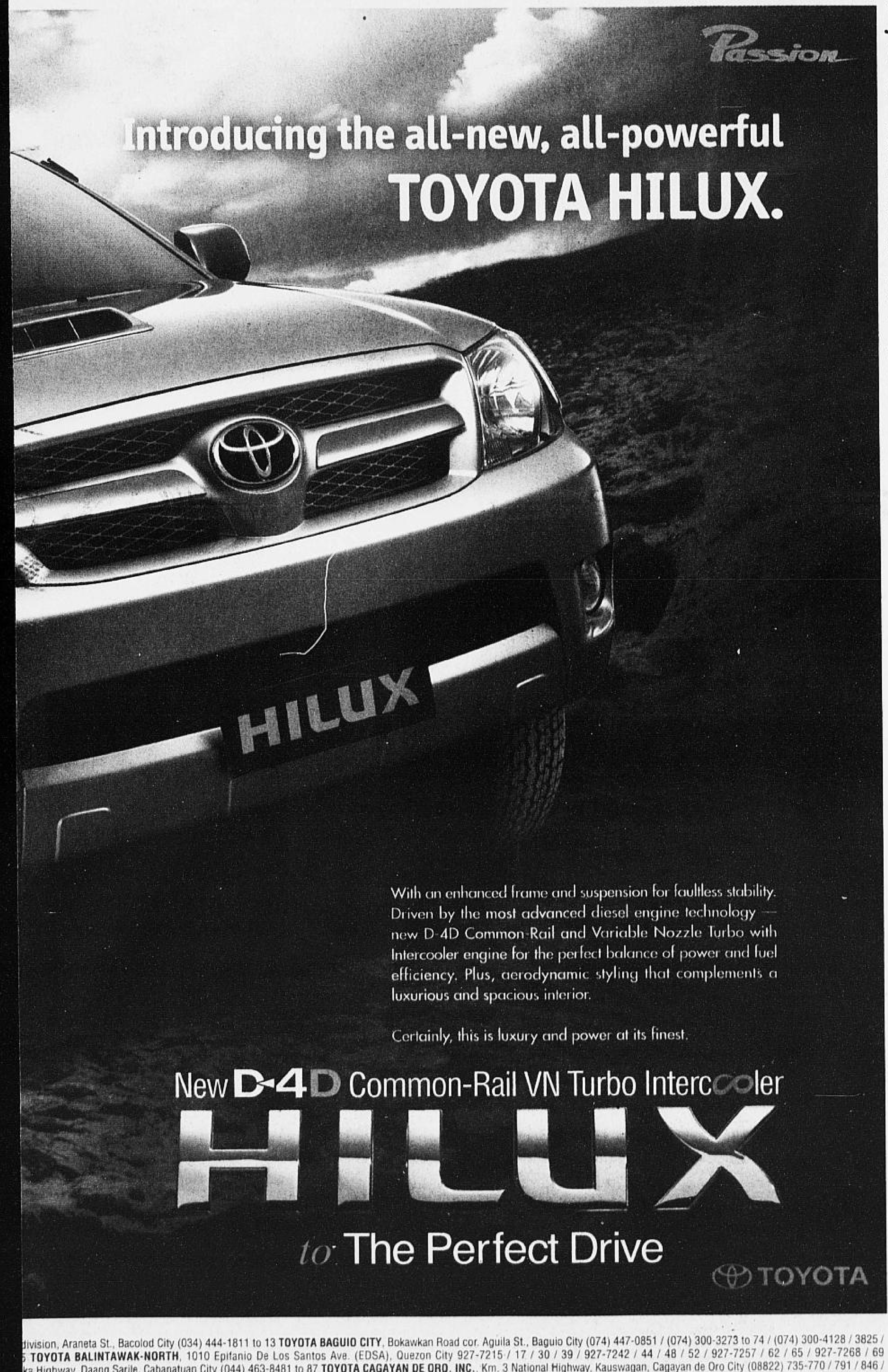
During the outbreaks earlier in the year, more than 100 million chickens and ducks were culled or died in 10 countries and territories in Asia, including more than 40 million in Vietnam.

Animal health officials have recently warned that seasonably cool temperatures and the increased transportation of poultry between now and the Lunar New Year holiday in early February create conditions favoring the spread of the virus.

Transport ban

Prime Minister Phan Van Khai this week ordered a ban on transportation of sick poultry from affected areas, and heavy penalties for those who sell sick birds at markets.

International health officials at a conference in Singapore earlier this month warned that the world's next pandemic was likely to be a potent mix of avian influenza and a human flu virus—and that it was likely to emerge from Asia. *AP*



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Japan emperor's only daughter Sayako to wed

TOKYO—Japan on Thursday ended a year of disasters on a happy note with the royal family announcing that the emperor's only daughter Princess Sayako will marry, a piece of good news delayed twice by tragedy.

Sayako, 35, will marry Yoshiki Kuroda, 39, a commoner who is an urban planner for the Tokyo metropolitan government, at a date "after the summer," the palace announced.

"Mr. Yoshiki Kuroda is the right partner for Princess Norinomiya. He is an excellent person," Imperial Household Grand Steward Toshio Yuasa told a news conference, referring to Sayako by her royal name.

Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi will head an eight-member government panel that will tap into state funds for the wedding, including a dowry payment for Sayako, who by custom will give up royal status upon marrying the commoner.

Japan had eagerly anticipated the wedding of Sayako, a professional bird researcher who had earlier said she would think about marriage "in my own way at my own speed" amid a national trend of settling down late.

News of Sayako's marriage had been in the media since mid-November but the palace twice delayed announcing it—first when an earthquake killed 40 people in central Japan and then when 92-year-old Princess Kikuko died hours before a press conference on the engagement was to be held on Dec. 18.

On Thursday, the press conference went ahead but again coincided with tragedy.

Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko issued statements on the same day on their daughter's engagement and offering condolences for victims of southern Asia's catastrophic tsunamis.

In their statement on the 35-year-old and 39-year-old fiances, the emperor and empress said: "We feel very confident about the decision of these two young people to share their lives together after two years of courtship." *AFP*

Massacre of 800 Albanians during Kosovo war bared

BELGRADE—Some 800 ethnic Albanians exhumed from a mass grave near Belgrade following the 1998-99 war in Kosovo were the victims of mass executions, Serbia's war crimes prosecutor said Wednesday, in the first such admission from a Serb official.

"In (the Belgrade suburb of) Batajnica were found the remains of people who had been victims of mass executions in Kosovo," prosecutor Vladimir Vukcevic was quoted as saying by Beta news agency.

Vukcevic's statement confirmed long-held claims by Serbian and international non-governmental organizations as well as Kosovo Albanian officials that ethnic Albanians were the victims of mass execution during the conflict.

The remains of some 800 ethnic Albanians were exhumed in 2001 from a mass grave at the Serbian secret police training camp in Batajnica, near Belgrade.

"Following the exhumation and autopsy it has become clear that those people were not killed by bomb explosions, but their wounds showed that they had been executed," Vukcevic said.

The prosecutor said his office "will this year make public what happened there."

Out of about 900 Kosovo Albanians whose remains have been exhumed from Batajnica and two other mass graves in Serbia since the war, only about 350 have been identified and repatriated to their families.

Of 3,192 people still listed as missing from the war, 2,460 are from Kosovo's ethnic Albanian majority, 529 are Serbs and 203 are from other ethnic backgrounds.

Kosovo has been a UN protectorate since a Nato bombing campaign forced Serbian forces to withdraw from the southern province in 1999. *AFP*

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OPINION

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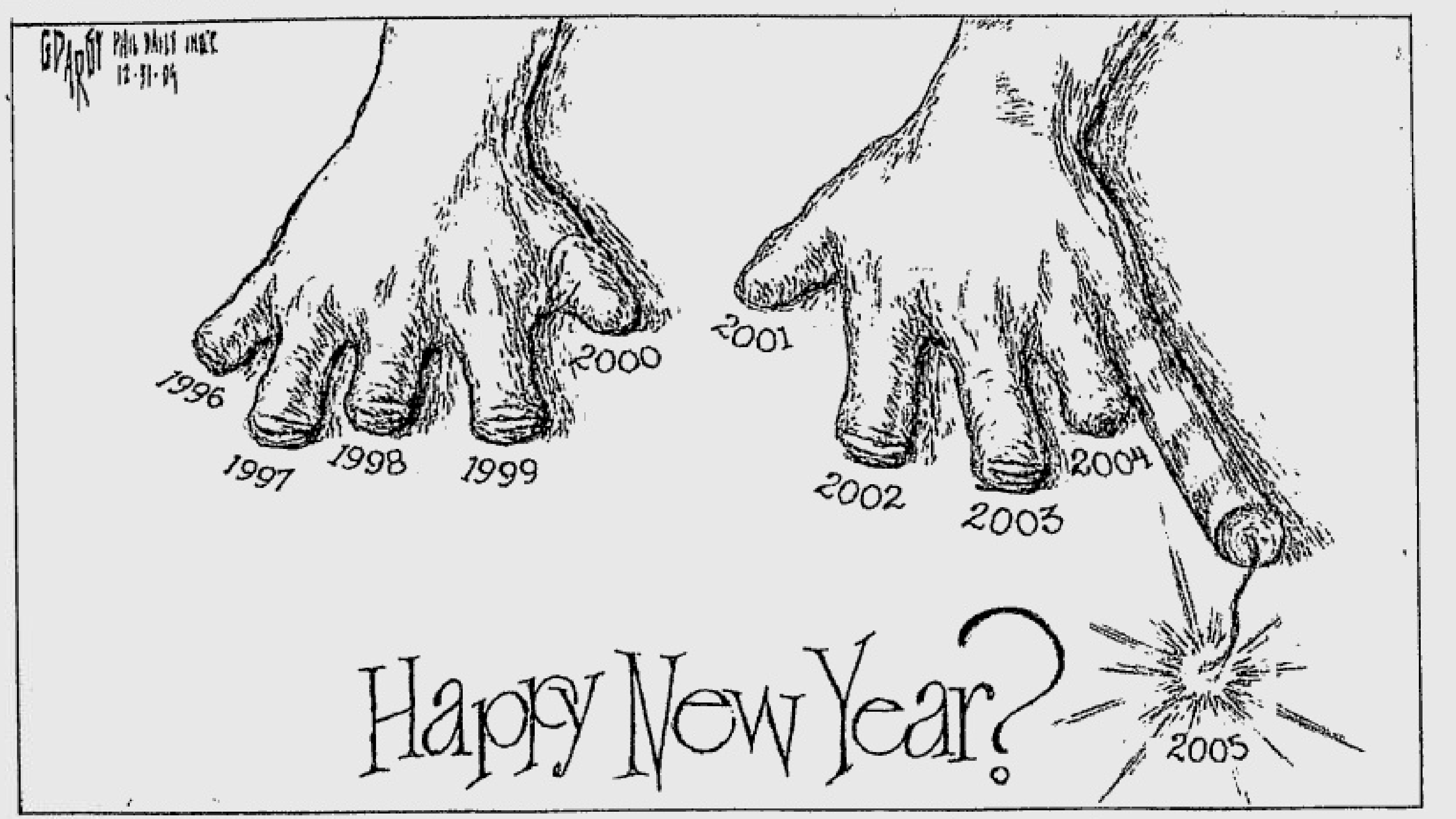

Dangerous revelry

EDITORIAL

TONIGHT the skies will light up with a thousand and one flares and a legion of blazing portents. No, it's not the end of the world. It's just the traditional New Year's Eve revelry of fireworks, firecrackers—and fiery or fatal accidents.

To the credit of this reckless nation, the revelry through the years has become less and less deadly. Despite the characteristic tendency of revelers to explode themselves to kingdom come, there has grown a movement and a critical mass promoting and exercising caution and restraint during the celebration. That mass is building up.

For instance, the police leadership this year has pledged to crack down severely on violators of the law on illegal firecrackers. Banned pyrotechnics are those that contain more than 0.2 grams of explosive ingredients, ignite in less than three seconds or before the count of six, and carry no manufacturer's label. In the Philippines, these pyrotechnics come with such fancy names as "big triangle," "super lolo," "thunder," "mother rocket," "five-star," "OG," "pla-pla," "pillbox," "whistle bomb," "giant whistle bomb," "atomic bomb" and "super bawang."

It seems local authorities are cooperating with the police initiative. Gov. Josefina Cruz of Bulacan, the firecracker capital of the Philippines, has urged consumers to use only regulated pyrotechnics bearing business registration numbers. She said that the provincial government would crack down on illegal firecracker manufacturers and implement to the letter Republic Act 7183, the law on pyrotechnics.

But local governments seem impervious to a 2002 memorandum from the Department of Interior and Local Government to designate firecracker zones in their localities so as to regulate the festivities. Perhaps this measure should be tried and tested. It may yet rationalize firecracker use and limit its potential for damage and danger.

But there's also concern about police and military officers firing guns at the height of the revelry. Cases of illegal discharge of firearms in the past years have led to deaths and injuries. Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes has warned policemen, soldiers and firemen who will fire their guns that they would be charged and fired from the service.

Safety precautions tonight cannot be overemphasized. Untrammeled and irrational use of firecrackers has maimed and even killed thousands. It has also rendered thousands homeless on the occasions when firecrackers cause fire accidents. Although firecracker accidents have been on a decline since 1999, there's a need to further lessen the incidence. There ought to be new warnings about the irreparability of a firecracker injury since many survivors die of tetanus infection later on, as statistics of the health department tend to show.

Moreover, there's the environmental threat. Firecracker use contributes to the despoliation of an environment already stretched to its breathing limits by industrial and residential pollution. There must be a more welcoming way to welcome the New Year without compromising health and the ecology.

Save your fingers tonight

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

Happy New Year to everybody. May all your fingers remain intact after the revelry.

ON THE EVE of the New Year, when the whole Philippines erupts in a paroxysm of explosions and most Filipinos lose their common sense (and some their fingers), the Philippine National Police again issued a press release, as it always does at this time of the year, warning that those who manufacture, sell and explode illegal firecrackers would not escape prosecution. Another press release said the PNP would set up "pyrotechnic zones" in Metro Manila to prevent injuries and death and fires during the revelry. Residents are supposed to fire and explode their pyrotechnic devices only inside these "pyrotechnic zones" and not in front of their homes or anywhere else.

As with most PNP warnings before New Year's Eve, nobody will pay attention to them, and people will continue to buy and explode illegal firecrackers in front of their homes. Nobody will bother to use the "pyrotechnic zones," but the PNP will not be able to arrest and prosecute persons who violate the rules. Moreover, many guntoters, including policemen and soldiers, will fire their guns into the air (and put innocent people in danger; a few will actually be hit and injured and even die) but almost nobody will be arrested, prosecuted and jailed. Tomorrow, everything will be forgotten—until next New Year's Eve.

A third press release, this time from the pyrotechnics manufacturers of Bulacan, complained that imported firecrackers were killing the Philippine pyrotechnic industry. All these are inter-related.

All the casualties, and all the PNP warnings (which are never enforced anyway) would be unnecessary if the police and the local government units (specifically, of the municipality of Bocaue and of the province of Bulacan) would monitor the manufacture of pyrotechnics to make sure only the legal and safe ones are made. If the manufacturers would only limit themselves to the smaller and safe devices, they could manufacture all the firecrackers they want, even export them, and nobody would be hurt.

But the makers think that if they produce the powerful pla-pla, super lolo, thunder and other miniature bombs, they would be able to sell more. So they defy the law and put their customers in danger because of greed. And customers will foolishly continue to buy them as long as they are available.

The key, therefore, is to watch the manufacturers while they are still manufacturing their pyrotechnics, not later when they are already finished and are being sold. When the illegal firecrackers are already finished, the makers will try to sell them, even on the sly, because they will lose money if they don't.

And local manufacturers are losing out to the importers because imported firecrackers are safer. Our process of making pyrotechnics is still primitive compared to those of other countries such as Hong Kong, Taiwan and China. If we would only send our own workers to these countries to study how they make theirs, we would be able to compete with them and develop our own industry.

It is to their own benefit if the manufacturers obey the law and limit their business to the making of safe firecrackers. But they are greedy and stubborn and don't see the light. It is the duty of the government to see to it that they do.

* * *

The Philippine Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) will greet the New Year with a free service for pet owners and to curb the population explosion of dogs and cats.

PAWS will hold its first "Spay-Day at PARC," a monthly free neutering program for dogs and cats. Pet owners who wish to avoid unwanted kittens or puppies are invited to bring their pets on Jan. 30, Sunday, to the PARC shelter on Aurora Boulevard, near Barangka, Marikina. For more information, call PARC at 475-1688. A PARC location map can be found in www.paws.org.ph

On March 20, Sunday, PAWS will join the Philippine Canine Club Inc. and other groups, in the biggest "Dog Walk for a Cause." The main objective of the activity is to protest the indiscriminate killing of dogs. The event, which will be participated in by various groups holding simultaneous walks in different parts of the country, will attempt to break the record in the Guinness Book of Records for the largest number of participating dogs and their humans, and the longest walk (approximately 5 km). Interested parties may call 475-1688, for additional information on the dog walk and how to join. Free rabies vaccinations will be given to all dog-participants joining the PAWS group, on Jan. 8, 2005.

Let's all help make a statement in defense of man's best friend and be part of Guinness history.

Finally, a reminder for tonight's revelry. Dogs are terrified by firecracker explosions. Their hearing is 10 times more sensitive than that of humans. So what sounds like ordinary explosions to us are terrifying to dogs. Put wads of cotton in their ears to deaden the sounds and take them inside the house, stay with them, pat and stroke them to reassure them at the height of the revelry.

* * *

TODAY'S JOKE: FPJ's electoral protest before the Presidential Electoral Tribunal will take very long to resolve and cost a lot of money. But there is a faster and cheaper way. To determine once and for all who really won, GMA should have her own funeral to see who between the two of them, FPJ or GMA, will have the bigger number of mourners and marchers.

Rizal: nationalism, exile and return

PASSION FOR REASON

Raul C. Pangalangan

IF "exile is the nursery of nationalism," then the eight million OFWs must be our long incubated patriots for the 21st century. Historians say that Jose Rizal and his fellow *ilustrados* found themselves in Spain detached from their native land, and for the first time identified one another not as Tagalogs, Ilocanos, Kapampangans, or Visayans, but as Filipinos. Every schoolchild on these islands knows the story of how the term "Filipino," erstwhile used to describe the Creole Spaniard, came to refer to us, the natives.

Today the *ilustrado* discovery of Filipino-ness in 19th century Spain is replicated in the lives of OFWs, exiles by economic necessity, except that for them, their political identity as Filipinos is already officially defined: they travel on Philippine passports and are identified by foreigners as Filipinos. What is left to be rediscovered abroad is their cultural identity, that ever-unanswered question on what it means to say that we are Filipino, beyond singing "Lupang Hinirang" and reciting "Panatang Makabayan."

The law can easily identify who is Filipino, but it is an entirely more complex thing for us to identify ourselves as Filipinos deep in our hearts. That is more elusive, especially to scholars who must explain it in words and with footnotes, and that is why we must seek our Filipino-ness, not in our official lives where we fill out forms and take oaths of allegiance, and turn instead to our day-to-day lives where the true self comes out more honestly.

It was during the five Christmases I spent abroad in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that I realized how much I hankered for Filipino food. Well-meaning friends in Manila would joke that Filipino food was nothing but Chinese food with Spanish names. Yet in the midst of winter, I asked my wife to set aside writing her master's thesis on "Conflict of Laws" just so she could cook *adobo* for me, and indeed buy an air purifier so that she could do it despite the sealed windows and kill that awful smell so glorious on white steamed rice, yet a lethal bouquet when it sticks to our down jackets, the carpet, the curtains, the books, everything! We knew it was impossible to replicate the warmth of Pinoy Christmas in Boston's winter, but with food, the memories of home, especially my mother's heavenly cooking, were instantly transported across the Pacific. (And when foreigners ask me what wine goes with *adobo*, I tell them it goes best with a tall glass of ice cold Coke.)

Until then, I would have found it unthinkable that I had not fully become a Filipino in Diliman, yet in hindsight, what I had imbibed was nationalism of the cerebral sort, at best one that was defined in terms of what we were fighting against, whether it was to fend off the Metrocom truncheons, their anti-riot squads and water cannons or oppose the US military bases. To be Filipino, we strived to be the opposite of good, obedient colonials, and rebelled.

But being Filipino must go beyond explicit causes and must turn inward toward personal longings. Today, I would say to those whose nationalism is stunted at the political, never transcending to the cultural: *Magpakatotoo ka!* (to borrow the words of that wonderful ad).

Conversely, a Filipino may live abroad, but at night when he sleeps, he dreams of the hometown, and during lulls at work the next day, his mind would play with homegrown remembrances or fret over Manila-bound troubles. He is present in the Philippines more than we can imagine.

Jose Rizal embodies the "estranged native," much like the "Queen's Chinese ... the Anglophile Indian, or [the] Parisian Marxist who happens to be Algerian," or in Rizal's novel "Noli Me Tangere," the character Crisostomo Ibarra, who draws "his authority from his distance, he stands outside, in some privileged place, where he has access to 'advanced' or universal principles." (M. Walzer, "Interpretation and Social Criticism," 1993)

But Rizal also exemplifies Walzer's "connected critic," who "argue[s] with his fellows-who, angrily and insistently, sometimes at considerable personal risk ... objects, protests, and remonstrates." That is why Rizal soon despaired of the *filibustero's* work in Spain and returned to Manila.

Explaining his decision to return, Rizal could very well have spoken of the Philippines today: "Life in Filipinas has become unbearable ... there, there is no morality, no virtue, no justice! ... For this reason I think that La Solidaridad is no longer the battlefield. It is a new struggle we now face ... The fight is no longer in Madrid." He felt that the propagandists were "brave only while they were in peaceful Europe, 'far from the fire'." He concluded: "The cure must be brought to the sick." (O.D. Corpuz, "Saga and Triumph: The Filipino Revolution Against Spain," 2002)

Corpuz hailed Rizal as a radical visionary, but some politically correct historians denigrate Rizal as a "mere" reformist, an enemy of the Revolution. To them I recall the genocidal costs of past crusades for ideological purity around the globe, and remember the closing scene in "El Filibusterismo": "Our ills we owe to ourselves, let us not toss the blame to anyone. ... [When] we see our own countrymen in private life feeling shame within themselves, ... and in public life keep silent, to make a chorus with him who abuses ...; while we see them enclosed in their selfishness, praising the most iniquitous deeds with forced smiles, begging with their eyes for a portion of the booty, why give them freedom? ... Why independence if the slaves of today will be the tyrants of tomorrow?"

* * *

Comments to raul.pangalangan@up.edu.ph

Terminal 3 expropriation just a start

ANALYSIS

Amando Doronila

THE ADMINISTRATION of President Macapagal-Arroyo begins the new year with a key economic-related decision that raises false expectations, with the promise to open by mid-year the still uncompleted Terminal 3 of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport. This target opening date for the terminal, which has remained unused for more than two years, is unrealistic and glosses over the thorny issues that have to be overcome before it can be operational.

The government may have acted decisively when it moved last Dec. 21 to expropriate the terminal, but expropriation is only the beginning of clearing the path to resolve two important issues: first, the "fair and just" compensation to be given to Piatco and its foreign partner, Fraport, for building the terminal; and, second, ensuring that the terminal's facilities are functional and safe, befitting a "world-class airport." The administration's announcement seems to convey the impression that the exercise by the government of the power of eminent domain to take over a facility built on public property "in the public interest" works like magic that banishes hard issues. The government is putting its credibility on the line by setting an unrealistic deadline. If not met, this could blow up in the government's face.

There are at least two important reasons the government wants to show results early in the new year. It is facing the specter of a disastrous plunge in its public opinion rating (negative 5 percent at the end of the year) and is seeking to reverse it before it sinks the administration into a permanent quicksand for the entire year. The other urgent reason is that it faces a possible credit rating downgrading by international rating organizations. If the administration fails to open the new terminal according to its target date, it is going to damage extensively its credibility in getting things done, and a disappointment is certain to sink her rating even more deeply.

Additionally, the President starts the new year with an impression of action by calling Congress to a special session for a few days to pass a couple more of the eight urgent tax measures as a demonstration of the political will of the administration to stem the fiscal crisis in order to avert a credit downgrading.

With the decision to expropriate Terminal 3, following the breakdown of negotiations with Piatco and Fraport, the administration wrenched the dispute from the hands of international arbitration bodies. Fraport has brought the dispute to the World Bank's International Center for Settlement of Investment Disputes in Washington, D.C., while Piatco has filed a recovery case before the International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce in Singapore. Fraport is demanding $465 million in recovery costs while Piatco has filed a claim for $500 million with the ICC in Singapore. The government finds these claims exorbitant and "unreasonable."

After stepping out from international arbitration, the government has asked a Philippine court to appoint a three-member commission to determine the "fair and just" compensation for Piatco and Fraport. While the right of Piatco and Fraport to fair compensation was conceded by the government, the vexatious issue is the amount. Determination of the amount will be a time-consuming process that is unlikely to be completed within six months.

Although there is strong pressure and a broad consensus for the immediate opening of the terminal, there is equally strong pressure, both domestic and international (from the investment community), to expedite decision on the compensation. Although business groups expressed their approval of expropriation, they have insisted on just compensation. The Makati Business Club said, "We note with approval that the expropriation...comes with the assurance from the government that will pay fair and just compensation for the facility as ordered by the Supreme Court." The MBC noted that the results of its business opinion survey released two weeks ago showed that a large number of Filipino and foreign businessmen "wanted the government to address this infrastructure problem by next year." A business conference last November identified Terminal 3 as a key infrastructure project and said that its opening would help stimulate renewed investor interest in the Philippines.

The Manila International Airport Authority this week began a survey of the terminal to determine whether repairs are needed to get it operational, since there have been reports that its facilities have deteriorated in the last two years. The expropriation order by the court authorized entry by government authorities into the terminal, from which they had been barred by Piatco, and enabled them to conduct an inventory and inspection of its facilities.

To counter Piatco's and Fraport's claims, the government has made counterclaims against the consortium, amounting to $907 million which will have to be adjudicated by the three-member judicial commission.

Up to now, the terminal does not even have a cargo terminal and it will take more than six months to build it. The cargo terminals are located at Terminals 1 and 2. The plan was to build a tunnel to connect Terminal 3 to the cargo terminal. This tunnel was not built because it would have cost an additional $18 million.

Japanese and Filipino engineers will conduct the survey of the facilities. The Takenaka Corp., which built Terminal 3, has submitted a report saying that a number of facilities were below specifications.

Doomsday reflections

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

AS we bade 2004 and its many heartaches behind, allow me to share with you an article written by TV journalist Howie Severino and published in the last quarter 2004 issue of "i" The Investigative Reporting Magazine.

Focusing on "Philippines 2015," this issue of "i" seeks to paint a scenario of the future in various sectors, from the media to education to health and the family. Asked to write on the environment, Severino details the many anxieties he and his wife Ipat Luna went through as they awaited the birth of their son two years ago. As Severino points out, it's difficult, if not indeed impossible, for anyone, even the unborn, to "escape" from the environment. In fact, it's our children who are the most vulnerable to the environmental dangers around us today, and who will pay the price tomorrow for our selfishness and indifference today.

Perhaps for 2005, we can all ask ourselves the question Severino posed to himself: Have we just pushed back doomsday to a later date? And what can we do now to ensure that day never comes? Excerpts from Severino's article follows.

* * *

PARANOIA and guilt are among the occupational hazards of covering the environment. I have not had too many moments of ease while learning all I can about the overwhelming threats to the planet.

...(On) the environmental beat, it's hard not to imagine a personal responsibility for at least some of the ills our earth is heir to—garbage, air pollution, or even open-pit mining (oh no, this computer I'm using contains mined resources)...

So it was inevitable that a sprinkling of paranoia and guilt mixed up with the tremendous joy I felt when I heard the news about my coming first-born. My wife Ipat and I had waited seven years for that news, withstanding the family pressures and whispered rumors that accompany such a long wait. But that was time also spent thinking about such things as an intriguing article I once read about a human extinction movement, where people chose not to reproduce until our species just faded away. It was the most radical way I had heard of to save the earth.

Yet I knew no matter how much I wanted to save the planet, I just as dearly wanted to have a kid, even just one. Human extinction was not going to be one of my options.

Still, it seemed like nature had other plans for us for quite a while. So when our fertility doctor finally confirmed on the ultrasound what the pregnancy test told us, we were stunned. That lovely throbbing spot on a black and white monitor was not just our baby-to-be, it was living proof that hey, we really were part of the web of life, along with algae and frogs, and it felt great.

* * *

AFTER THE INITIAL happiness, though, anxiety started setting in. We had long worried about my wife's health, her asthma attacks induced by the thick air pollution around our subdivision, a floating soup of white dust from a nearby cement factory combined with the darker particles from vehicular traffic. Since our advocacy against air pollution had so far been ignored by both government and industry, the short-term remedy called for chemical steroids that enabled Ipat to breathe.

But the ingestion of chemicals was a mixed blessing at best. Chemical poisoning and its effects on animal reproduction, after all, was the subject of "A Stolen Future," a grim book both Ipat and I read while pondering human reproduction.

When pregnancy did occur, we seemed to face a Solomonic choice: the risk to the baby of chemical exposure in the womb, or the threat of asthma from not using the chemicals. In the end, after consulting our doctor, we decided that not protecting the mother would be a greater danger to the baby. But it was lesser evil that still filled us with dread.

* * *

WE did eventually move out of that dusty subdivision to another part of the big city. But Metro Manila is a smorgasbord of dangers to the unborn. Much of our food contained untold pesticides, our water was contaminated by lead pipes, and so on down the line of nightmare-inducing environmental hazards. This was the world our baby would be born in, surely much worse than the earth I inherited in 1961, four billion people ago. It wasn't my fault of course that the world ended up this way. But had I done enough to make it better?

...(O)ne day we took refuge in a movie theater...(but) it was only at the height of the action in "Black Hawk Down"...that I realized that all that realistic mayhem and acoustic warfare could have some traumatic effect on our baby. Add another dash of guilt to the brew of emotions.

After nine months of this roller coaster, which included confidence-boosting Lamaze lessons, we were finally in the hospital for The Moment. We dared not voice our fears, but as well informed as we were, we yearned for blissful ignorance for a change. The Lamaze lessons became useless when the baby refused to come out the natural way and he had to be surgically extracted. My knees were wobbly, but my video camera was rolling when the baby entered the visible world, his eyes wide open, looking at the strange contraption pointed at him without a hint of fear or even surprise.

All his body parts were intact. He cried. He was normal! I suddenly felt relieved, relaxed, and very human.

That was two years ago. The baby has become a frisky, talkative toddler. Alon Roberto Luna Severino eats organic food, has never tasted softdrink, and still breastfeeds. He's healthy and happy, without any evidence of chemical or movie-induced trauma.

His parents' generation has not been able to save the earth, the causes of our paranoia and guilt growing all the time. But now we also have a reason to feel optimistic and grateful. Perhaps this baby is a sign, at least to his parents, that maybe, just maybe, we pushed doomsday to a later date.

A Rizal cottage industry

LOOKING BACK

Ambeth R. Ocampo

ANOTHER intriguing item in the Nov. 28, 2004 auction of the Philippine Numismatic and Antiquarian Society was a book reputed to be one of the last objects owned by Jose Rizal. Lot number 625 was described in the catalogue as follows:

"La imitacion de Cristo by Tomas de Kempis (1890). Published and printed by Libreria Religiosa, Barcelona in 1890. This religious book has a handwritten dedication addressed to Dr. Jose Rizal and was signed by Father Pastells. It was believed that the same book was given to Josephine Bracken just before he was executed in Luneta. Extremely rare. US$3,500."

If the above description is accurate, then this devotional work of which thousands of copies were printed gains particular emotional and historical significance to Filipinos. A photograph of the handwritten dedication of the Jesuit Pablo Pastells to Rizal in the catalogue can surely be authenticated by one of the following Jesuit historians: Fr. Jose Arcilla, Miguel Bernad and John Schumacher. If the signature is authentic and this book kept Rizal company in Fort Santiago during his last hours, then it is really something a collector will find irresistible. But then if this was the same book given to Josephine Bracken, where is the handwritten dedication by Rizal?

Years ago, I examined a copy of another "Imitacion de Cristo" with a handwritten dedication on the flyleaf that read, "To my dear and unhappy wife Josephine," signed and dated by Rizal on Dec. 30, 1896. This was in the possession of a daughter of the late Dr. Silvino Dayco and at the time it was the focus of a family quarrel. Since this was but one of a handful of books with the same dedication, I wasn't impressed, though this had collaborative proof: a letter from then National Library Director Teodoro M. Kalaw written in the 1930s requesting Dr. Dayco to lend the book to the library for an exhibit of Rizal memorabilia.

I have lost track of this book, but I am sure it will surface again someday at auction. At the moment, all I have is a vague memory of it and the pleasure of having handled the original sometime in my misguided youth.

The above led me to re-read the newspaper dispatches sent to Madrid from Manila in December 1896. The late Dr. Domingo Abella, former director of the National Archives, was a medical doctor who spent a lot of time in the libraries and archives of Spain and the United States researching on the history of Bicol. Being one of the early researchers in Spain, he was fortunate to catch a lot of rare Filipiniana in Spanish antiquarian booksellers. Among his prized acquisitions were four scrapbooks containing newspaper clippings on the Philippines from Madrid newspapers in the years 1896 and 1897. While contemporary historical research has shot holes into the accuracy of these newspaper accounts, one can still describe the material as "history in a hurry." With critical reading and some cross checking, one can find use for these nuggets of information. They are not a complete waste of time.

Abella published some of the dispatches concerning the execution of Rizal in the special 1961 Rizal issue of the Historical Bulletin and translated these from the original Spanish. Thus, we have the reports of two correspondents in Manila for the Madrid papers: Santiago Mataix of El Heraldo de Madrid and Manuel Alhama of El Imparcial. Life was indeed difficult in an age without e-mail. Correspondents had to write their copy in longhand and to evade the strict censorship in Manila, the dispatches were sent to Hong Kong from where they were cabled to Madrid.

I doubt much of the material dispatched on the day of execution, but this was the report sent in by Alhama that appeared in the newspapers early in 1897. It described Rizal as having gone to confession four times and, in apparent mood swings, he either told jokes or read a devotional book, giving the impression that he wasn't worried about his impending execution. Then we read:

"Josephine Bracken, Rizal's woman, was conducted to the chapel. Rizal, greatly moved, greeted her by extending his hand. A priest performed the marriage ceremony, at the end of which Rizal asked Josephine: 'And now, what will happen to you? What are you going to live on?'

"Josephine answered: 'I shall make a living by giving English lessons.'

"The lady was trying to suppress the emotion which she was feeling. Shortly after, Rizal expressed his wish to receive Holy Communion, which was administered to him by a Jesuit priest. He bade goodbye to his wife, and at the parting moment, he muttered some English words and asked her something in a low voice, to which she answered, 'Yes, yes.'

"When Josephine disappeared, Rizal, sobbing, threw himself into the arms of Father Faura [now better remembered as that dingy Manila street, Padre Faura]. Meanwhile, Josephine in the next compartment, stamping her feet furiously, was shouting: 'Miserables! Crueles...'"

Now, with some violin music in the background, you have enough material for a dramatic movie scene. No wonder there is so much romance and tragedy in Rizal's life and death. There is a lot of material to go on, many relics like devotional books sold at auction to keep the Rizal cottage industry churning for the next century. If only other heroes had as much documentation, our history would be more engaging.

* * *

Comments are welcome at aocampo@ateneo.edu

Digital tales

PINOY KASI

Michael L. Tan

WE'VE seen the footage played over and over again on CNN of tsunami waves moving up the shore and making their way inland like some creatures from outer space, devouring anyone and anything in their path.

Besides its graphic display of nature's sheer power, what's so amazing about the videos is that they were not taken by the network's camera crew. They're home videos taken by families and tourists as the tsunami swept in.

It does seem strange that someone would rush to get a camera as a tidal wave comes in, but that tells us something about human beings' need to record everything. From cave paintings dating back tens of thousands of years to home videos today, it seems we're driven to tell others about what's happened and, these days, what's happening.

I thought I'd share a few insights into these digital technologies, digital tales for the new year to emphasize that the future is here, and we better be prepared for it.

In touch, instantly

The digital technologies have been most dramatic in the way they are so instantaneous. The cellphone companies have cashed in on the "instant" angle to sell their products as a useful tool for emergencies, especially for children who may need to contact their parents.

I'm sure the phones can be useful, but we also have our share of sad stories here, such as the victims of the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001 calling their loved ones on their cellphones from the World Trade Center and from the planes. More recently, we had the story of KC de Venecia calling her elder sister to ask for help as a fire raged outside her bedroom.

The digital camera—still or video—is amazing in the way it allows us to literally shoot from the hip. There's a whole generation of babies right now who will someday be overwhelmed by the number of photos and videos their parents took of them, most often affectionately and sometimes, well, almost mischievously to record many awkward and hilarious moments of childhood.

And don't forget your pets, which can be as unpredictable as babies. Without a digital camera, I wouldn't have been able to catch one of my cats as she sat in front of a mirror looking at herself. Or of another cat perched on a log, one paw reaching out for orchid blooms.

Professional photographers scoff at how the digital cameras still lack clarity. Don't believe those ads claiming the cellphone can capture awesome sunsets and the smiling faces of your entire *barkada*. These cellphones still use cameras with a 1.1 megapixel resolution, which gives you pictures that look like the view from eyes with cataracts.

The key here is to ask the dealer about the megapixels: the higher you go, the clearer the resolution. You can get fairly good photographs with low-cost digital cameras offering a 3.3 megapixel resolution, with slight blur even enhancing the photograph. I've had friends asking about a photograph I took of an Italian villa by a lake, shrouded in early morning fog. They were startled when I told them I used a cheap digital camera to take it, "cheap" having actually added on to the misty ambiguity. Also try printing out some of the digital pictures in black and white—sometimes they actually look better!

Digital greetings

The holidays do remind us that cellphones can be useful as a quick way of greeting as many people as you can. Just compare the number of Christmas cards you got this year with the number of texted greetings.

Sure, some of the greetings can be quite banal while others are innovative with their graphic designs. With the miracles of digital technology, you can save the good ones to send to others. I was able to recycle a favorite from last year, a poem by Bienvenido Lumbrera that fits into one text message. The poem compares Christmas greetings to old perfumes that keep their scents forever: "Parang lumang pabango/Ang 'Maligayang Pasko,'/Samyuin, angkinin mo/Pagbating laging bago!"

An important reminder: make sure to identify yourself in your texted greetings. My father was complaining to me about how many "anonymous" greetings he got. Your number is not automatically identified in your friends' phone unless they have it entered completely with country and city code.

A fancy alternative to the cellphone greetings are the electronic cards you can pick out from the Internet. I used it a lot a few years ago but eventually found it rather tedious, both to send out and to receive. With digital cameras now, you can design your own card and send out, but do be careful about keeping their size down. It's not polite to send huge e-mail files out to people, especially if they're all pictures of yourself.

Virtual realities

We live in an age where digital images and sounds can create new virtual realities. Digital technologies are both boon and bane in the way they allow you to modify reality, to flatter or to vilify.

Cellphones and e-mail allow you to pretend to be someone and somewhere you're not. Cellphones have been especially diabolical, expanding the possibilities of deception for the delinquent child or a philandering spouse. I'll never forget passing a student at UP Diliman in the corridor as he shouted into his cellphone, "Honey, I'm still in Cebu." A sign of the times: there's at least one Filipino pop song now playing on the theme of an unfaithful husband lying to his wife with his cellphone.

Of course, Smart offers a service to keep track of your child or spouse, using satellite global positioning systems (GPS) to identify someone's location, down to the street. The problem is that both parties—the checker and the checked—have to be on Smart as well, and the person being checked needs to have his or her phone on. Besides, if you need to keep monitoring someone's whereabouts, you might want to reflect on how such "instant communications" may only be worsening a relationship where you've actually lost touch.

That's what I fear most with digital technologies: the illusion that technology can substitute for direct communications. Parents have to realize that giving a child a cellphone isn't going to strengthen the parent-child bond; in fact, it could create new problems of hooking young children into this cellphone craze, and tempting parents and children to use the phone to evade the need for face-to-face contact.

Two years ago, there was a case in Malaysia where a man texted his wife, "I divorce you," three times. Malaysia's Supreme Court eventually decided this high-tech variation on an old tradition was not valid; you have to say it to your spouse, face-to-face, for it to take effect.

Have a safe New Year and keep in touch.

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Everybody knows why

WASHINGTON's decision scrapping the "shortcut" visa for Filipino nurses seeking work in the United States (PDI, 12/10/04) is the most ominous clue yet that *adobo* is off the American menu. And everybody knows why.

Never mind the Philippine decision to quit the coalition last July in order to save Angelo de la Cruz.

Never mind that the "baby-boomers"—Americans born between 1946 and 1964—are nearing the age when health care worries become a scary reality in the face of declining health.

Never mind that absent a massive infusion of foreign health care professionals, American hospitals will be forced to shut down entire wings, while others may go out of business—a prospect that affects far more Americans than Filipinos looking to prosper in these uncertain times.

Never mind that no other country—including America—comes close (to the Philippines) to bridging the domestic US nursing gap with the expert talent needed.

Above all, never mind that without enough nurses to go around, America's aging population may soon be waiting in line to access earned entitlements that, for millions, mean the difference between quality health care and doing with less, or even without.

Why is it so hard for Washington to understand that America is shooting its own feet by shooting down Filipino nurses wanting to work in the United States?

Blackballing Pinoy nursing talent is a lose-lose proposition for both the Philippines and the United States, which will now have to wait until the big shots in Washington figure out that no amount of coaxing or incentives will force American nursing schools to double their output of graduates in order to meet skyrocketing domestic needs.

With one-third of the US population in the "baby-boomer" (and beyond) age bracket, that's enough to give nearly 100 million Americans in or near their prime health care years the mother of all headaches.

As for trained Filipino nurses looking to put their skills to work in the United States, that simply is the difference between being welcomed as competent health care professionals and being swept away in the riptide of anti-foreigner sentiment "back in style" since 9/11. (I beg to differ, but Filipinos are not the enemy.)

—ELLIOTT ANDERSON,
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Mining Act's safety nets

FR. John J. Carroll said that the latest Supreme Court decision on the Mining Act of 1995 may bring much-needed foreign investment into the country, but the downside is that we'll have more environmental disasters in the future. (PDI, 12/12/04)

Indeed, indiscriminate and irresponsible mining can ruin the environment and cause misery to our people. That's why the Mining Act contains provisions against the reckless exploitation of our natural resources.

Applicants for a mining permit are required to submit an environmental protection and enhancement program (EPEP) which includes plans for: the mining operation, rehabilitation, reforestation of mined-out areas, slope stabilization of tailings areas, aquaculture, watershed development, water conservation, and socio-economic development of the mining communities.

Five years before the expected mine closure, the contractor is again required to submit a Final Mine Rehabilitation/Decommissioning Plan (FMR/DP) to ensure that all disturbed areas are restored as close as possible to their original condition or to the pre-agreed productive land use. Done in consultation with the local governments and the communities, it includes the social plan to minimize the impact of the mine's closure to the host and neighboring communities as well as to the mine employees.

The Act also mandates the setting up of two special funds which will be collected from mining companies:

- A Contingent and Rehabilitation Fund (CRF) to finance the activities of a multi-partite team that will monitor the rehabilitation activities of the mining firm and its compliance with environmental safeguards.
- A Mine Wastes and Tailings Reserve Fund (MWTRF) to compensate for whatever damage to properties the mine wastes and tailings may cause.

Father Carroll argued that mining operations, especially open-pit mining, have had an adverse effect on surrounding communities and have even caused the displacement of indigenous communities in the mountains. Under the new regulations, mining operators are required to get a document called free and prior informed consent (FPIC) from the affected community so as to maintain social harmony while the mining operation is going on.

Requiring the FPIC in areas claimed as ancestral lands is the government's way of recognizing the rights of indigenous peoples (IPs) to their land. The IPs are entitled to a royalty from the annual gross revenues.

Likewise, the inclusion of representatives of the IPs, local government units and nongovernment organizations in the Multi-Partite Monitoring Team (MMT) ensures transparency in the monitoring of mining operations.

These measures are among the safety nets provided for by the Mining Act.

—VET VITUG,
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Unappreciated friends?

TWO quite unusual news events happened hereabouts several days ago, but not many people showed much interest in them.

I am referring to the (1) visit of Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong who talked, among other things, about his country's "best practices" in combating corruption (PDI, 12/11/04), and (2) the holding of a workshop here by Hong Kong's top graft buster, Tony Man-wal Kwok, "to share Hong Kong's experience in fighting corruption" with our government officials. (PDI, 12/16/04)

We can all agree that the two recent visitors are well-meaning friends of the Philippines who came here out of a sincere desire to help. But since our country has a long history of graft and corruption, I am sure many Filipinos (54 percent according to the British-based Transparency International) are one in mind that the situation here could turn from bad to worse simply because our so-called leaders—many of whom are not God-fearing—lack the political will to fight corruption, period.

If I remember correctly, it was the late Vicente Albano Pacis who wrote in his INQUIRER column that the Spanish colonizers "made a mistake" in not naming our country Islas de Ladrones, or words to that effect. Like Claro M. Recto, who once remarked, no doubt with a tinge of nostalgia, that "the last honest administration we had was the Harrison administration" (1913-1921), Pacis knew that every administration we have had was always rife with across-the-board thievery. Indeed, the graft and greed combination has become a fact of life here, if not a way of life yet.

Is it any wonder, then, if many Filipinos were not delighted at the lectures and teachings of the two well-meaning visitors from Singapore and Hong Kong?

—JESUS NATANAUAN,
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Talisay, Batangas 4220

An icon, an idol

I CAN still remember my brothers and I, when we were very young, requesting an early dinner every Saturday because we had to watch FPJ movies on GMA 7. We never missed one. It would be hypocrisy if I did not admit that I was and I am still a fan of Fernando Poe Jr.

Watching his movies then—especially for us from poor families, who are always looking for something to cling to for hope—enriched our lives and gave us more reason to look to the future with more promise and confidence. His movies most of the time were stories about the power of the poor over the abusive rich; and, somehow, they assured us that the good always prevails over evil. As such, he became the poor people's icon and idol.

I must admit—though it might sound cheap and lame to others—that I drew some inspiration from FPJ's films. I learned that no matter how difficult and unfair life is, there is always hope.

The article titled "'Da King' had 5 best traits Filipinos seek in a hero" (PDI, 12/18/04) hit it right. Filipinos look for the nurturing, "*maka-Diyos* (God-centered)," courageous, just and sincere leader. Fortunately, FPJ had all these qualities, and that made him acceptable to most Filipinos.

He might have left physically his millions of fans, but he will always remain with us as an icon and our idol.

—RICHARD S. LEMENCE, Ph.D.
Niigata University, Japan

SSS in financial crisis, or simply inefficient?

THIS is a reaction to the response (PDI, 11/27/04) of Joel P. Palacios of the Social Security System to Manuel N. Oyson who had complained about the delayed remittance of SSS pensions. Before the last national elections, Oyson wrote, he would receive his monthly pension check a week before the due date right at his residence. But as of Oct. 28, he has yet to receive his monthly pension checks for the month of September and October.

Palacios said that the SSS was saddened by Oyson's insinuation that the SSS is politically motivated. Palacios explained that under its charter, Republic Act 8283, the SSS is mandated to safeguard a trust fund, the SSS fund, for the private sector employees. As the administrator of the fund, it is accountable only to its 25 million members and pensioners. Well and good.

Palacios, however, failed to mention the fact that the SSS is also mandated to send the monthly pension of its pensioners regularly and promptly. These are hard, uncertain times. With the prices of everything going up especially the prime commodities, pensioners are hard-pressed. With their meager pension, they could hardly make both ends meet.

Oyson's problem is not an isolated case. I, too, am a pensioner of the SSS. I used to receive my monthly pension regularly within four days after the 15th day of every month through the Philippine National Bank, Tabuk branch.

My nightmare began last September. Twice that month I went to the bank to withdraw my monthly pension. But an employee of the bank told me that the SSS was off-line. So when an SSS representative from Tuguegarao came to Tabuk, I inquired why I have not received my monthly pension for the month of September. I was told to go to SSS Tuguegarao to have a digitized SSS ID card taken. I had my digitized ID card taken on Oct. 1. 2004.

Unfortunately, as of this writing, I still have to receive my SSS ID card. I have yet to receive my SSS pension for the month of September, October and November. It's already December, and I am afraid I will not receive my December pension, too.

I know that my case is not an isolated one because there are other pensioners in Tabuk who are going through the same problem. Perhaps, there are more of us throughout the Philippines. One question I would like to ask: Is the SSS also affected by a contagious disease popularly known as "financial crisis"? Or is it simply that no one at the SSS has ever heard of the word "efficiency"?

—EDUARDO G. GACUYA, M.D.,
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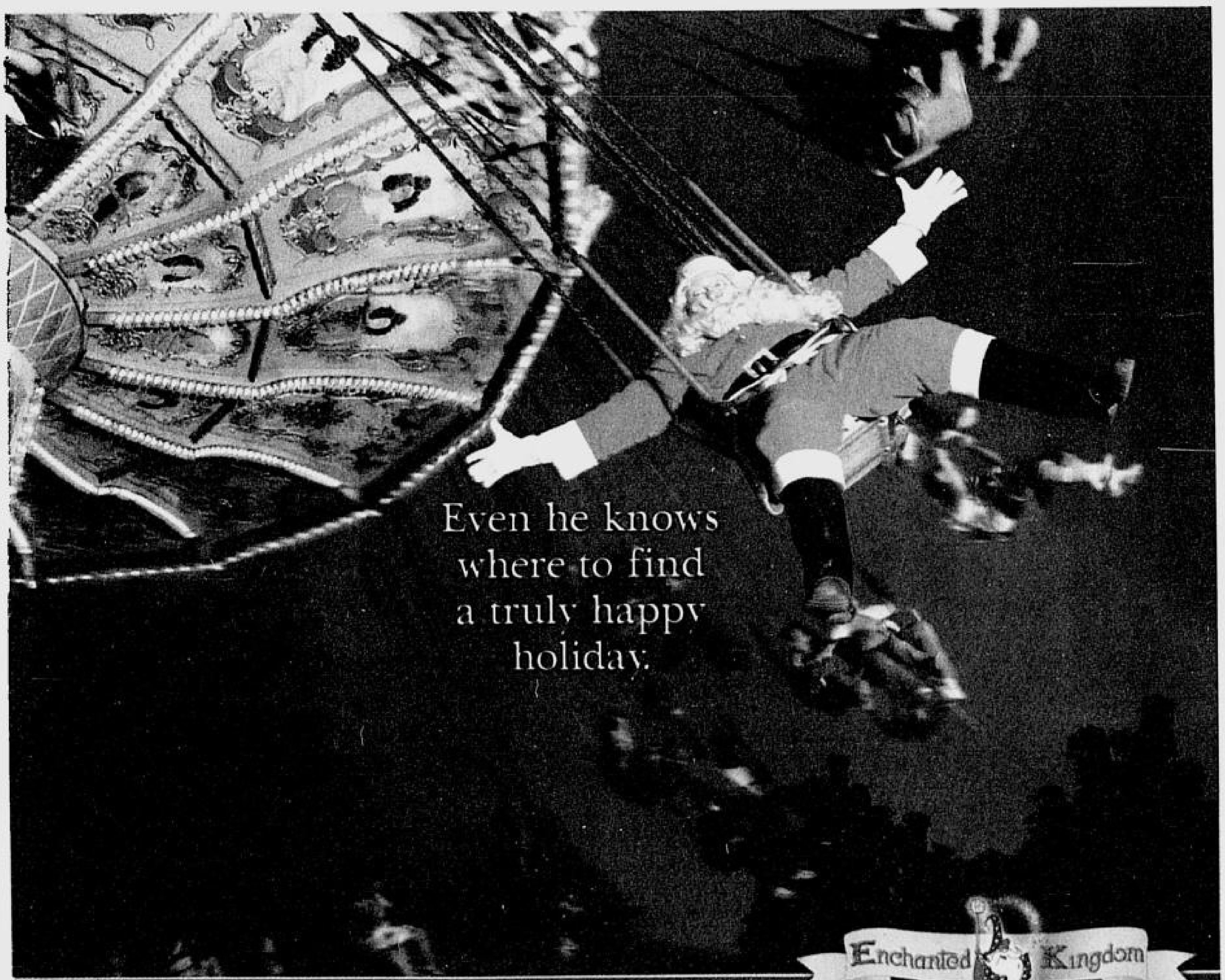
Province of Kalinga



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Charade

MAY the soul of "Da King" rest in peace.

Let's pay Fernando Poe Jr. the tribute due him but let's not treat him larger than life.

And I definitely am not going to go with the charade being played by President Macapagal-Arroyo and her surrogates, which included arranging a special Mass and expressing their sympathies in public, in front of the cameras.

Yes, FPJ was a luminary in the Philippine entertainment industry, whose memory will live on; the man idolized even after death. And yes, by my own reckoning FPJ, however "good" he may have lived his life, isn't the statesman people think he was, now that he is gone.

I am not saying that his fans and supporters should shed themselves of their fanaticism. I am just saving the day from being polluted by charlatans and hypocrites (for example, Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Rep. Prospero Pichay, Ronald Lumbao, among others). It's galling to note that politicians took advantage of FPJ's passing just to gain media mileage.

Even worse, media were irritatingly irresponsible by sensationalizing his death, instead of paying tribute to him. Poor FPJ was cajoled into running for the presidency and lost, no thanks to his politician-friends and showbiz pals. To our friends in the media: Wake up and be responsible.

—JACQUELYN A. EVANGELISTA,
Pandacan, Manila

Silence on NPA's human rights violations

WHILE some sectors of society give their hats off to the noble rescue efforts done by the men in uniform in Quezon and Aurora, detractors continue to harp on the human rights violations allegedly being committed by members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines.

In the Hacienda Luisita incident, critics were quick to point an accusing finger at the soldiers and the policemen who, they said, were trigger-happy individuals and puppets of the rich.

What about the unsolved killings attributed to the communist rebels? How about the brutal death of Pastor Noli Madarang who was reportedly ambushed by communist rebels on his motorcycle while traversing Sitio Kapalaypayan in Barangay Cassague, Sta. Cruz, Occidental Mindoro?

Why is it that human rights advocates seem to single out the military as No. 1 human rights violators and do not raise a howl when such violations are committed by the New People's Army? I have yet to hear of human rights advocates denouncing NPA members for such violations.

—CARLITO V. LEDESMA,
Estrella Street, Makati City

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Solon says nat'l gov't cheating LGUs

By Romy Amarado
PDI Visayas Bureau

DUMAGUETE CITY—Negros Oriental Second District Rep. Emilio Macias II has accused the national government of cheating the local government units of billions of pesos of their rightful share from the value-added tax collected by the Bureau of Customs.

Macias said that under the Local Government Code, LGUs are entitled to 40 percent of the internal revenue collected by the government through the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR). Two of the main sources of internal revenue are the income tax and value-added tax (VAT).

Yet, he said the national government denied the LGUS of their share in VAT collected by the Bureau of Customs (BOC) running to billions of pesos.

He said that last year alone, the BOC collected around P53 billion in VAT, which means that more than P21 billion should have been given to the LGUs as their Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA).

The BOC, Macias added, was delegated by the BIR, through a memorandum of agreement, to collect VAT from imported and exported items and services subject to it.

He also said he had brought the matter to the attention of Budget Secretary Emilia Boncodin and former Finance Secretary Isidro Camacho in 2003 who, Macias said, agreed with his contention.

But until now, he said, nothing has been done about the matter.

Macias said he was still giving the national government time to consider his claim, otherwise, he would be forced to sue responsible officials.

"If they will not listen to me, I will bring this matter to the court," Macias said.

Macias said he was seeking only for the share of LGUs in last year's BOC's VAT collection, since a similar collection by the bureau in the past had long been spent by the government.

Macias, a physician by profession, also said he has filed a bill mandating that the share of the LGUs from the VAT collected by BOC be allocated to health services in the country.

Should he succeed in his move for LGUs to get their share from the P52 billion VAT, each of the 84 million Filipinos will be entitled to a little over P300 in budget for health services in one year.

"When I say health services it includes the different aspects of health care delivery system. This includes the improvement of salaries of health workers, training of doctors, health insurance, equipment, among others," Macias said.

He also said such situation could help encourage doctors to remain in government hospitals.

Macias said he has asked the support of the governor's league of the country and other local officials because if his move is successful, all localities will be benefited by it.

Macias said he was also confident that he would get the support of his colleagues in Congress.

But Negros Oriental Gov. George Arnaiz, while strongly supporting the move of Macias, said it would be a tough battle in court, anticipating strong resistance from the national government.

Groups give slain social worker award for dedication

By Estanislao Caldez
PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

TUGUEGARAO CITY—Two groups of social workers and officials of the Cagayan government presented a posthumous award to the family of an official of the Department of Social Welfare and Development who was killed by men who sought help from her agency in October.

Primitiva Cabrera, assistant chief of the DSWD in Cagayan, was abducted on Oct. 19 by men who introduced themselves as New People's Army rebels. Cabrera agreed to meet one of the suspects to check on the condition of his companions who were supposedly sick and were willing to surrender to the government. Her body was recovered on Oct. 28 in Lallo town.

The Association of Local Social Welfare and Development Officers of the Philippines honored Cabrera "for offering her life to the welfare and development of the marginalized, oppressed and disempowered."

"Let the unselfish life she led be a guiding light for others to be inspired, for others to take solace on, and for us to always remember that our fight is a noble one," the group said in its citation.

The Philippine Association of Social Workers, during its fifth annual convention in November, also cited Cabrera for her "unselfish commitment and dedication to serve the disadvantaged sector and for her pursuing the oath of the social work profession."

The Cagayan provincial board, in a resolution, called Cabrera's death as "a great loss to the provincial government."

READY FOR THE BANG

RUDY ESPERAS

A boy stands in front of a firecracker stall in San Ildefonso, Bulacan holding a set of firecrackers he and his family bought in preparation for the coming of the New Year.

Alarm raised over burning of Negros plantations

By Carla P. Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

BACOLOD CITY—The police yesterday expressed alarm over the series of burning of sugarcane plantations in central and northern Negros in the past three weeks that had razed about 46 hectares of sugarcane plantations in four towns.

Most of the fires that had hit plantations in Moises Padilla, Isabela, Manapla and E.B. Magalona, Negros Occidental were believed to be the work of arsonists, the police said.

The latest in the series of arsons took place on Dec. 26 in Moises Padilla where about 16 hectares of sugarcane plantations owned by Rafael Abello, Arsenio Nangan, Alfonso Garcia, Napoleon de los Santos and General Garcia were razed by fire.

Supt. Mark Edison Belarma, the acting provincial police director, yesterday said the fire started in the cane plantation of Abello, and quickly spread to the adjacent farms of Garcia, Nangan and De los Santos.

Responding firefighters from Moises Padilla and nearby towns and cities put out the fire after two hours.

Twelve hectares of sugarcane fields were also torched by unidentified suspects in Barangays Cudangdang and Santo Niño in E.B. Magalona on Dec. 22 and 24.

Insp. Santiago Rapiz, E.B. Magalona police chief, yesterday said the burning incidents were intentionally done as the fire started in the middle of the plantations owned by Jose Antonio Velez and Jay Jalandoni.

Damage at the 10-hectare farm of Velez was placed at P2 million.

Terror war draws thin line between Islam, terrorism

COTABATO CITY—The global antiterror campaign is drawing a thin line between Islam and terrorism, according to reports compiled by the Philippine Council for Islam and Democracy (PCID) at a forum in Quezon City Sunday.

Amina Rasul-Bernardo, PCID chair, said this sad fact stems from Western misconception that Islam and democracy were such opposite forces that cannot coexist in a political system.

Rasul said that appropriate interpretation of the Koran and the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad has shown that "Islamic principles of governance are founded on democracy."

On Dec. 20, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution calling on all 151 member-states "to cooperate with the UN Commission on Human Rights to eliminate (these) new trends in racial and religious discrimination."

In the local antiterror campaign, Muslims who are helping the government fight terrorists have become themselves the target of military operations in Basilan province, said Mayor Tahira Esmael Sansawi of Lantawan town.

Sansawi cited an instance when her brother, a policeman, was arrested by military men ironically acting on reports provided by sympathizers of the bandit group Abu Sayyaf.

"Because of this, the young people (in Basilan) are developing hatred toward our authorities. This situation can breed a new generation of terrorists. The governor (Wahab Akbar) had to ask for the relief of an Army commander in the area," she told the forum.

Lawyer Michael Mastura, an acknowledged Muslim Filipino scholar, said it was worthy to note with irony that "constitutionalism is a product of the Anglo-Saxon experience, and the Anglo-Saxon experience is a poor imitation of the Roman Laws and of the Islamic Sharia combined."

House Deputy Speaker Abdulgani Salapudin went as far back as the Islamists' alliance with American forces against the invading Russian military during the Afghan war in the late 1970s. The war, he recalled, had bred the likes of Osama bin Laden, the world's most feared terror leader.

Prof. Aboud Sayeed Lingga of the Institute of Bangsamoro Studies said even Islamic schools have become potential targets of the local war on terror on suspicion that these breed terrorism.

"But where do terrorists come from?," Lingga asked. *Nash Maulana, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

GMA praises resilience of typhoon victims

By Melvin Gascon
PDI N. Luzon Bureau

DUPAX DEL NORTE, Nueva Vizcaya—President Macapagal-Arroyo on Thursday expressed admiration for the strong resolve shown by typhoon victims here, who tried to rise from the devastation wrought by the series of typhoons that hit the area early this month.

"I am very happy. Based on what I saw, although more than 1,000 families lost their homes, they had been able to work together; on their own, they had been able to clear the roads," the President said.

Ms Arroyo said her visit to Nueva Vizcaya was "to let the country know that there were other people from this part of the country who were likewise hit by the calamities."

"All the news that were reaching (Metro) Manila were about (the damage in) Real, Infanta, Nakar (in Quezon) and Dingalan (in Aurora). We want the entire country to know that people in Nueva Vizcaya also need help," she said.

With the people having helped themselves, the national government can now focus on rehabilitation efforts, she added.

"What we're working on now is to rehabilitate the farmers, by giving them seeds, (fish) fingerlings so that they can plant their crops and raise their fish all over again," she said.

The President visited the towns of Bambang and Dupax del Norte, two of the worst hit towns by Typhoons "Winnie" and "Yoyong," and distributed bags of corn, rice and vegetable seeds to the typhoon victims.

Instead of finding relocation sites for residents whose houses were destroyed by flash floods, Ms Arroyo said families who lost their houses would be given P25,000 each as aid.

Gov. Luisa Lloren-Cuaresma, chair of the provincial disaster management council, has placed the typhoon damage to property, infrastructure, crops and livestock in the province at P600 million.

Fourteen people were killed and 11 were missing after "Yoyong" hit Nueva Vizcaya on Dec. 2. Its strong winds and landslides and the floods triggered by rains accompanying the typhoon damaged more than 3,600 houses in the province.

Ms Arroyo said 2004 was a year "of triumph and tragedy." "We must look forward to 2005 as a year of urgent change and because we need a year of urgent change, what we will do is improve tax collections," she said.

In Quezon and Aurora, hundreds were reported dead and missing as floods brought down logs smashing into homes and inundating roads and streets.

A CHILD in Infanta, Quezon sits on a car stuck in mud brought by landslides and floods as a result of Typhoons "Winnie" and "Yoyong."

DELFIN MALLARI

Trust in cops tagged reason for less crimes

BAGUIO CITY—President Macapagal-Arroyo said the people's increasing trust in the police has contributed to the drop in crime rate.

"Today, more and more citizens report crimes and trust the police to do their job. Under this working partnership between citizens and law enforcers, we shall continue to keep our streets and communities safe and secure," the President said in a press conference on Thursday at the Presidential Mansion here.

In a phone patch with Ms Arroyo, Director General Edgardo Aglipay, Philippine National Police chief, said in the last quarter of the year, the police arrested 159,916 out 384,820 (42 percent) wanted criminals.

He said 7,422 of 16,220 (48 percent) of pending cases in the country had been solved, reducing the crime volume by 10 percent.

The crime volume reduction, according to Aglipay, was the PNP's promise to Ms Arroyo when he assumed the post of PNP chief on Aug. 24.

Ms Arroyo also cited the PNP for its raid on three shabu laboratories in Bataan and Bulacan on Wednesday.

"The three successful drug raids in Bulacan and Bataan (should be) highly commended. These cap our banner year against illegal drugs, bringing to 18 the total number of clandestine shabu laboratories and warehouses taken down, including the closure of major production facilities in Mandaue City and Parañaque City," Ms Arroyo said.

"Tons of illegal drugs have been confiscated and burned. We are not only hitting the big syndicates and taking their leaders into account but we are cleansing the ranks of law enforcers, (illegal) drug users, coddlers and protectors," she added.

On Wednesday, the police raided three shabu laboratories in Pilar and Mariveles towns in Bataan, and in Meycauayan, Bulacan, and seized 68,000 kilograms or P13.6 billion worth of ephedrine, a main ingredient in the manufacture of shabu.

The seizure was considered the biggest illegal drug haul this year. *Desiree Caluza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

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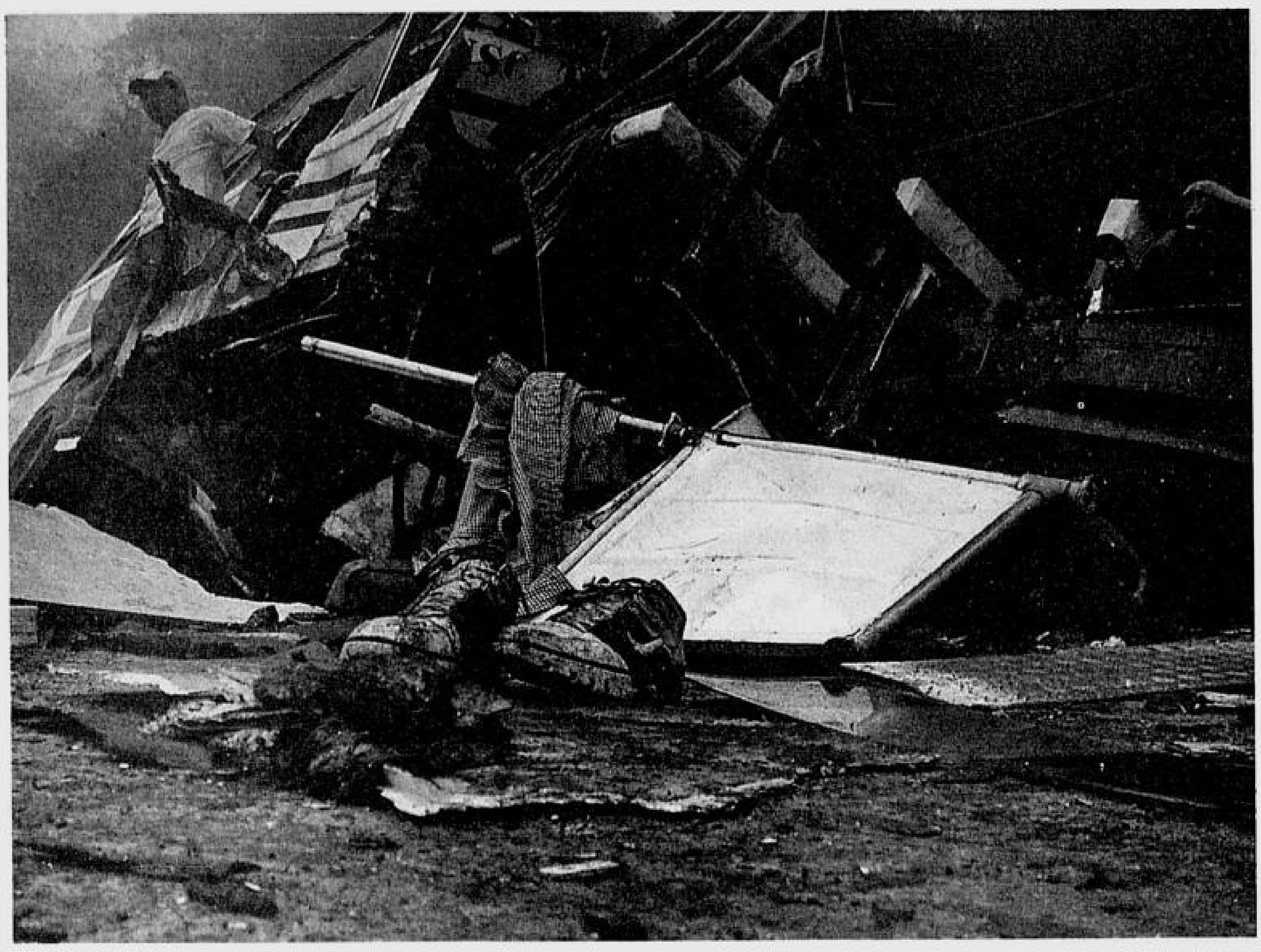

REMNANTS TOOTS SOBERANO/PDI NORTHERN LUZON BUREAU
A pair of sneakers, clothes and debris are strewn around the wreckage of a bus that met an accident in Tuba, Benguet on Dec. 29. Two people were killed and at least 20 were injured in the road crash.

Gloria visit to Baguio sign meningo not scary, says mayor

BAGUIO CITY—President Macapagal-Arroyo's presence at the annual Rizal Day rites at the Rizal Park here on Thursday was the signal that people should not fear meningococcemia, a fatal form of meningitis that had hounded the city in the last three months, Mayor Braulio Yaranon said.

The President asked Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit and Baguio doctors to brief her on Monday about the fatal meningitis bacterial strain that had killed 16 Baguio and Benguet residents since October.

Yaranon said doctors showed Ms Arroyo a documentary film clip of a child who was afflicted with the disease to explain the affliction.

"She was informed that this is a very serious disease . . . Thirty percent of the population has the bacterial strain," the mayor said.

Yaranon said the child in the clip that Ms Arroyo viewed survived the disease despite suffering from severe rashes.

"If (the disease) came to Baguio, it had also gone to other places, so this was not a matter isolated to the summer capital," the mayor said.

Ms Arroyo arrived at the Rizal Park here before 7 a.m. garbed in a Narda Capuyan ensemble consisting of a new sunset-colored woven sash wrapped around a stylish black suit.

Austere rites

It was an austere ceremony. The President marched quietly to Rizal's marble monument here, flanked by Philippine Military Academy cadets.

After the 10-minute ceremony, Ms Arroyo mingled with joggers who watched the rites, shook hands with bystanders, and exchanged pleasantries with World War II veterans.

A wave of text messages reaching Metro Manila warned people against making contact with suspected meningococcemia carriers in Baguio.

Dayrit clarified in a Tuesday press conference that contact actually means a more intimate association with a meningococcemia carrier and a casual contact will not infect anyone.

The language used by health experts in confirming the disease was also discussed by the President and Department of Health officials during the Monday briefing, Yaranon said.

"One of the medical experts said even one case (of meningococcemia can be considered) an epidemic. (Baguio Rep. Mauricio) Domogan and I immediately complained. I said, 'From the layman's point of view, an epidemic means hundreds of people already falling sick," he said.

Yaranon said this explained why even the President deferred to Dayrit when meningococcemia became a topic.

Experts

"We are not experts. They (DOH officials) are the best people (who can) talk about this disease," the mayor said.

Reports on the cases of meningococcemia have indeed affected tourism, Yaranon said.

Businessmen noted a low turnout of visitors, except for the Christmas weekend, when it hosted the two district conventions of a religious group.

"*Wala tayong magawa* (We can't do anything about the disease). It's there, but it is a very serious disease that is curable," Yaranon said.

He said doctors simply increase the body resistance of carriers and prescription antibiotics can prevent the disease. *Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

SC sacks judge who convicted Ecleo 'fall guy'

By Jolene R. Bulambot
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—The Supreme Court has ordered the dismissal from service of a regional trial court judge who became controversial here when he convicted the alleged fall guy in the parricide case against cult leader Ruben Ecleo for the slaying of his wife in 2002.

In an *en banc* decision promulgated on Dec. 17, the High Tribunal ordered the forfeiture of all retirement benefits and privileges of Judge Ildefonso Suerte, the presiding judge of RTC Branch 60 in Barili town, 60 km south of this city.

The decision stemmed from the report of the judicial audit team that investigated and found Suerte liable for incompetence, gross ignorance of the law and grave misconduct.

Suerte was due to retire in January 2005 but he was ordered suspended by the High Tribunal on Oct. 12, 2004 after it was discovered that he still handled and ruled on new cases, including the one that convicted an alleged accessory in the killing of Alona Bacolod Ecleo, despite a March 3, 2004 Supreme Court resolution ordering him to stop handling new cases and just resolve old cases in view of his impending retirement.

Deputy Court Administrator Christopher Lock told the INQUIRER in a long distance interview yesterday that Suerte's dismissal would be effective the day the judge receives an official copy of the order.

The INQUIRER tried several times to get Suerte's comment but his cellular phone had been turned off.

Lock, who led the inventory team, found at least eight violations committed by the judge in several cases he handled.

In his memorandum, Lock said Suerte failed to act on 170 cases despite the lapse of a considerable length of time since these were filed in his court.

Lock also found that Suerte took cognizance of 18 civil cases and three criminal cases after March 3, 2004, in violation of the Supreme Court's order.

One of the controversial rulings he made was on March 29, 2004 when he convicted Cedric Devinadera as an accessory to the killing of Alona Bacolod-Ecleo. In this case, Devinadera claimed he aided Alona's brother, Ben, in killing Alona. The ruling shocked many, particularly the surviving members of the Bacolod family, since Ben had been killed a year earlier along with his parents by a member of a cult group led by Ecleo.

The Integrated Bar of the Philippines-Cebu City chapter immediately called for Suerte's investigation because they believed he should not have handled the case knowing that there was a pending, and highly publicized, parricide case against Ecleo before another court in Cebu.

Suerte was also found to have failed to make judicious assessment and acted with undue haste in annulment cases filed in his court. As a result, the High Tribunal invalidated several annulments of marriage that Suerte had granted.

The Supreme Court also uncovered fabricated transcripts of stenographic notes in one of the decisions that Suerte rendered in another annulment case.

Suerte was also found to have violated procedural rules when he appointed an administrator of a disputed estate only a day after the petition was filed.

War over 'jueteng' turf turns bloody in Batangas

By Mei Magsino-Lubis
PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

TANAUAN CITY—In what could be a continuation of a gang war among several crime syndicates in Batangas, a suspected gang leader and *jueteng kabo* (manager) in Batangas was shot and seriously wounded after gunmen aboard a Pajero opened fire at them in Barangay Pagaspas in this city on Monday.

Victim Vivencio Javier, 52, barangay captain of Pagaspas and alleged *jueteng* (illegal numbers game) *kabo*, was in the house of his friend Aurora Mercado with another friend Allan Tapia, when a Pajero slowed down and the men inside it opened fire at the house.

Javier suffered a gunshot wound in the right thigh and was brought to the Daniel Mercado General Hospital in the city.

According to an INQUIRER source from the Tanauan police office who requested anonymity, Javier was the second in line in the province's *jueteng* hierarchy and became *jueteng kabo* last June after the killing of then *jueteng* manager Armando Lucido.

Lucido was killed in an ambush last June in Barangay Sambat, also in this city.

The vehicle of the suspects was recovered later that same day inside San Bernardo Village, Barangay Darasa, Tanauan City.

The INQUIRER source said the murder of Lucido and the attempt on Javier's life were just the start of the internal squabble for *jueteng* supremacy in Batangas and probably the entire Southern Tagalog.

According to the source, the suspect who wanted Javier dead could be another gang leader who wanted his post.

"Despite the continuous press releases from the capitol that Batangas is *jueteng*-free, nobody can deny that it is much stronger now, and worse, bloody. And we're theorizing that it's just the beginning," the INQUIRER source said.

The capitol that the source was referring to was Batangas Governor Armando Sanchez, who is known as the *jueteng* lord of the province but who keeps on telling the people that there is no *jueteng* in Batangas.

Since Monday, the Tanauan police have put up checkpoints in the city's main highways in an attempt to bag the suspects.

The INQUIRER learned that a group claiming to be from a Batangas *jueteng* syndicate tried to operate in Albay province through an influential town mayor but was outdone by the group of a certain Ramon Sadsad who claimed to be backed up by an in-law of Speaker Jose de Venecia.

The campaign against *jueteng* continues to falter amid reports that police and local officials are being bribed by gambling financiers to turn a blind eye.

The Church has been aggressive in the campaign against the illegal numbers game but is helpless against the continued popularity of *jueteng*, which provides jobs to hundreds of bet collectors.

Some legislators have proposed the legalization of *jueteng*, but the effort is stalled in Congress.

ROUNDUP

Firecracker hurts 2

CABUYAO, Laguna—Two persons were injured after an explosion rocked a firecracker factory and triggered a two-hour fire that razed at least three houses in Barangay Bigaa this town on Dec. 28. Police said Elegia Librida, 60, and Junjun Delmo, 20, were inside the house-turned-firecracker warehouse when an explosion sent the establishment to flames at around 2 p.m. The fire started from a hut that was used to produce firecrackers located about 50 meters from the side of the warehouse. Police said the factory violated procedures for firecracker manufacturing, including having electrical lines near the manufacturing area. Police ordered the closure of the establishment until completion of the investigation. *Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Firecracker zones

FIRECRACKER ZONE

CABUYAO, Laguna—Newly designated Calabarzon police chief of the Calabarzon Oscar Calderon on Wednesday asked Laguna Gov. Teresita Lazaro and the different mayors of the province to immediately designate a common "firecracker zone" in their respective municipalities to prevent injuries and other untoward incidents during the New Year festivities tomorrow. Calderon said local executives should specify certain areas where residents could light firecrackers and "celebrate the New Year without putting their lives and limbs in peril." "The mayors could establish their town plazas as firecrackers zones. It could also be on open fields which are thinly populated. That way, we prevent injuries without sacrificing the traditional celebration of New Year," Calderon said.
Marlon Ramos, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Smuggling foiled

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—The government's newly revived anti-smuggling task force on Dec. 2 foiled an attempt to smuggle out of this freeport zone a sports car worth P1.9 million. Retired Gen. Jose Calimlim, Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority, senior deputy administrator for operations and head of the task force, led the opening of a container van containing the car, one of the 19 luxury cars believed to be arriving here, inside the shipyard of the former naval supply depot here. The van was declared to contain two second-hand passenger vans and a used utility vehicle but Calimlim found two Delica passenger vans and a Mercedes Benz sports car. *Allan Macatuno, PDI Central Luzon Desk*

Logging monitored

SORSOGON CITY—An environment official here said while logging continued in Sorsogon, his office was closely monitoring the cutting of trees to make sure it doesn't exceed levels allowed by law. Oscar Dominguez, chief of the provincial environment and natural resources office of Sorsogon, said he was keeping tabs on the volume of trees being cut in the province, which has a thick forest. Dominguez, however, stressed that Sorsogon does not have any logging concession and has only four authorized lumber dealers and 26 registered furniture dealers. Rene Camacho, provincial environment and natural resources officer of Sorsogon City, said his agency was also closely monitoring the volume of logs being delivered to every furniture dealer. "Increase in volume means increase in supply, so if the volume and computation will not match their records, the agency will confiscate the products and logs," Camacho said.
Jerico Lagonoy, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

Sorsogon irrigation

SORSOGON CITY—Sorsogon Provincial Agrarian Reform Officer Emerson Moral said recently that the proposed second irrigation project in Casiguran town under the Agrarian Reform Program Infrastructure Support Project Phase II has been approved. The project will be funded with a P10.4 million loan from the Japan Bank for International Cooperation. The irrigation project will cover 106 hectares of land in Barangay Tigbao, which is within the agrarian reform community. Moral also disclosed that the first irrigation project located in Barangays Escuala, San Juan and Inlagadian was now operational. It covers 92 hectares, with 186 farmers benefiting from it.
Jericho Lagonoy, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau

2 die in Benguet mishap

BAGUIO CITY—Two men were killed after a minibus lost its brakes and hit a Baguio-bound delivery truck along Marcos Highway in Tuba, Benguet, on Wednesday afternoon, police said. A staff member of the Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center, where the victims were taken, identified the fatalities as Willie Austria and Alfie Solomon, both of Binmaley, Pangasinan and both crewmembers of the delivery truck.
Frank Cimatu, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau

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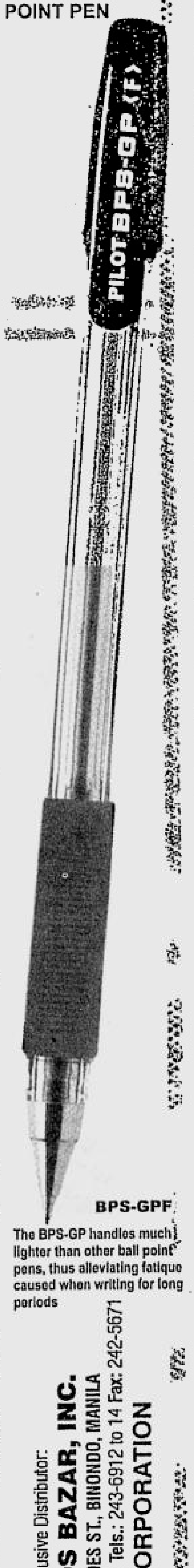

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Lucky stars shine on fortunetellers

By Tarra V. Quismundo

MUCH sought-after in good times and bad, Quiapo's fortunetellers are even more popular at the end of the year, with many anxious to know what the stars have in store for them in 2005.

The center of the action is the fringe of the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene, more popularly known as the Quiapo church.

Under its shadows, the sacred and the taboo mix.

"*Pagdating ng December at January, tuloy-tuloy ang buhos ng tao dito* (Come December and January, people visit us non-stop)," said Celia Collado, one of Quiapo's 60 or so fortunetellers who share a piece of Plaza Miranda fronting the church with vendors of herbal concoctions, crystals promising luck, religious icons and candles.

The 38-year-old fortuneteller, who calls herself Madam Celia, related that she earned more in the past few days than on regular days, "reading" predictions on the personal lives of strangers.

"I earn as much as P1,100 a day. When clients are hard to come by, I make P500," said Collado, who reports for work every day as early as 6 a.m. from her home in Grace Park, Caloocan City.

For every fortunetelling session, she charges her clients between P50 to P150, depending on how much of "the future" a client requests.

Business has been good for the family in the past days she said. Before the advent of Christmas, she only earned P400 a day, she told the INQUIRER.

Even while P150 of her weekly earnings is spent on rental fee for her spot in the busy plaza, Collada says she earns a decent income enough for her family to get by.

"*Sobra-sobra pa nga eh* (It's even more than what we need)," said the mother of three, who has been telling fortunes in one of the city's oldest districts for five years now.

Collado, who admitted she discovered her "psychic powers" from a handbook on fortunetelling, and what she called "divine intervention," has been using tarot cards and playing cards, to predict the future. She also reads palms, she added.

Her clients usually ask her questions relating to business, family life, school and career.

But Collado said the most frequently asked queries are those on the client's love life (or that of his/her lover).

For 46-year-old Beth Mariano, business has been good, giving her as much as P2,000 in daily earnings.

On slow days, she earns around P1,000, "but I never get a zero," she boasted.

Mariano says her clients keep coming back every now and then, especially when the predictions come true.

The fortune teller says she was gifted with the ability to heal and see the future in 1985.

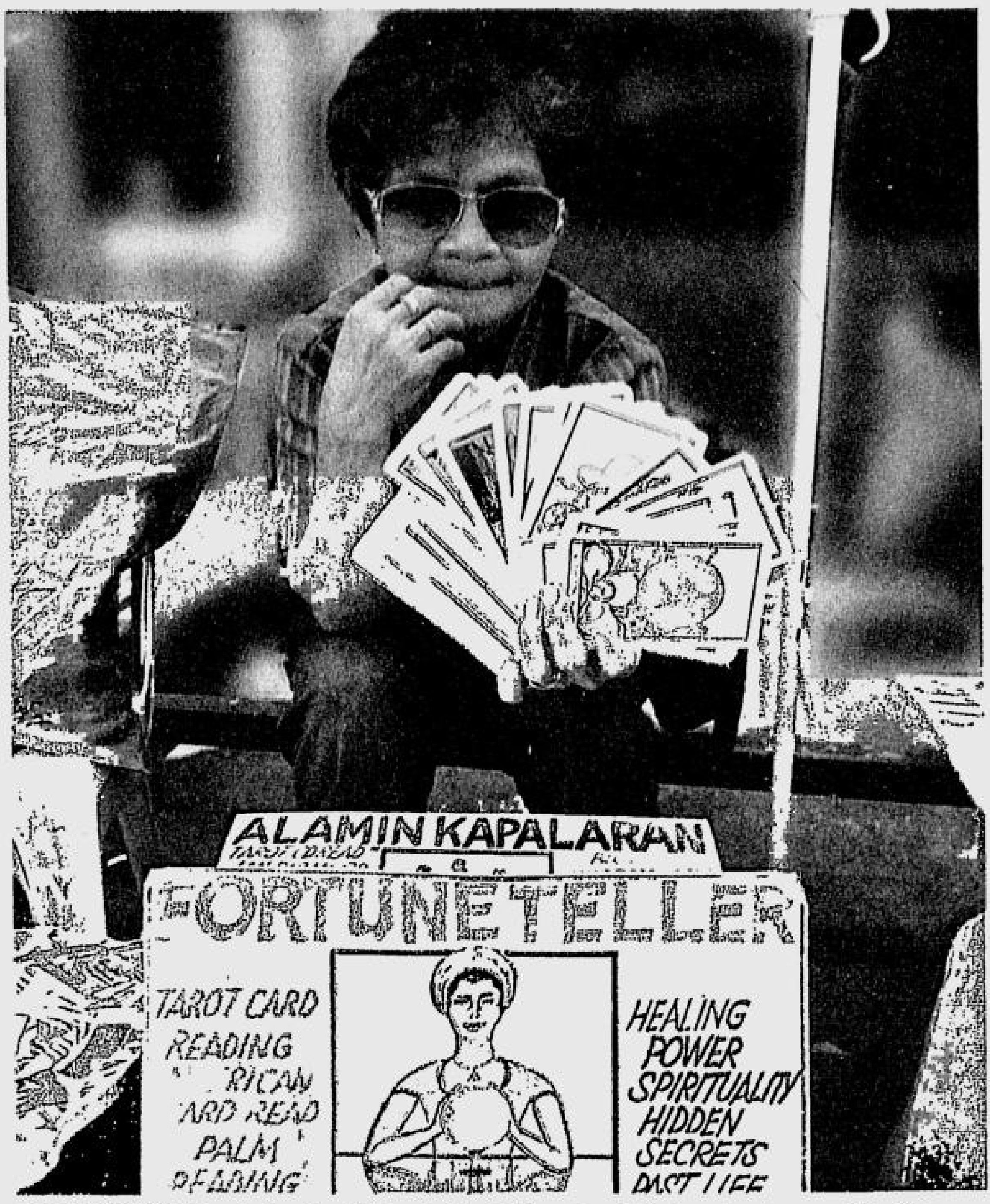
The Black Nazarene, no less, blessed her with healing and psychic powers, she said.

Armed with only a deep faith, Mariano proceeded to cure the sick as well as tell clients their future. "Even if I just look at your face, I could read your aura and tell you what is going to happen to you," Mariano said. "You don't even have to ask what you want to know."

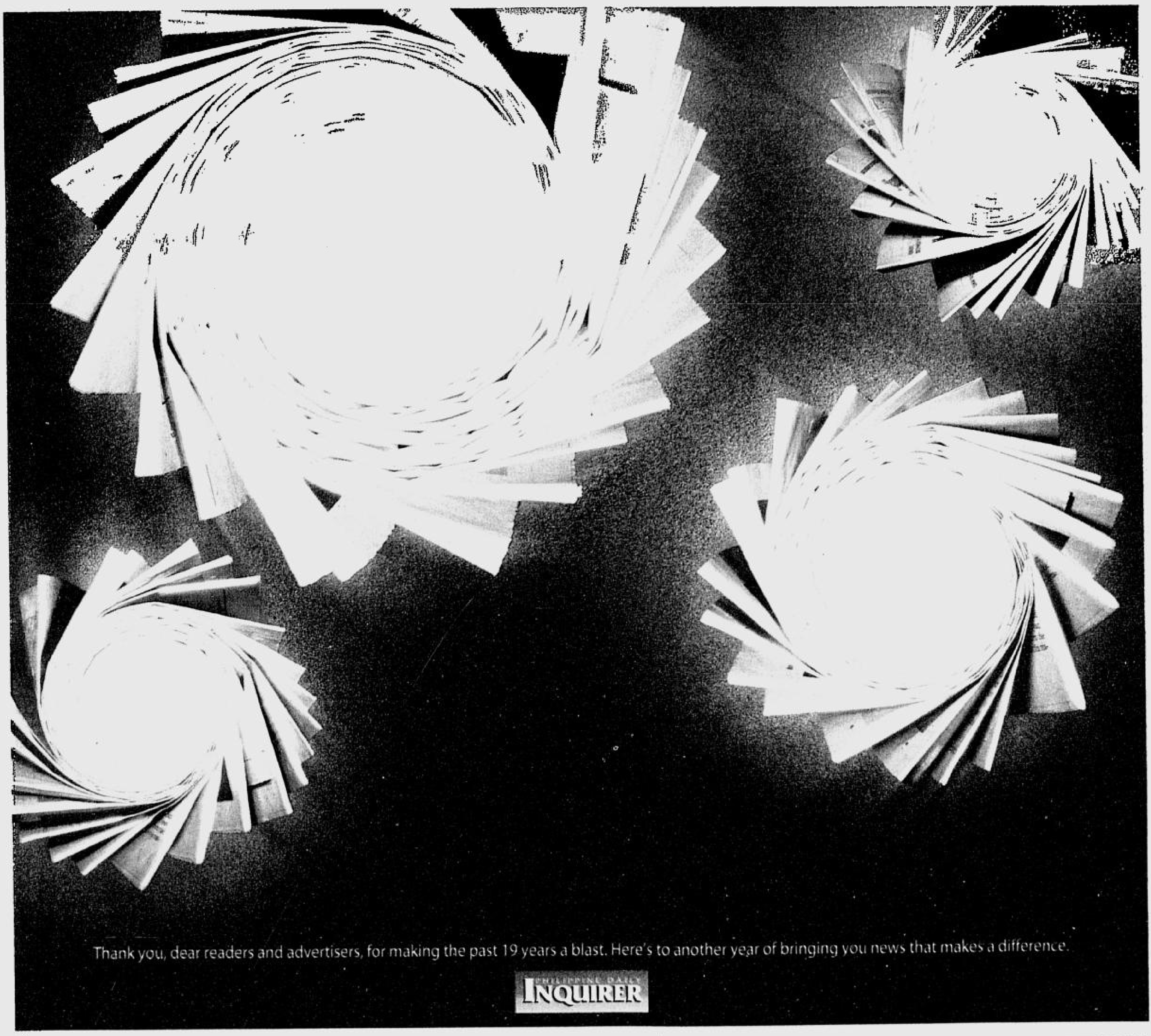
Like many of her colleagues in the trade, Mariano also uses tarot and playing cards to tell the future.

Some of their predictions may not come true, but there is one thing that Collado and Mariano know for sure.

The two gamely admit that although clients would continue to drop by until the end of January, they will find the lines thinner than usual in the months to come.



A FORTUNETELLER waits for clients in front of the Quiapo church. Business has been good for 60 or so card and palm readers in Plaza Miranda as the year comes to a close. JIM GUIAO PUNZALAN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Revelers told not to burn tires, or else...

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr. and Tarra V. Quismundo

UNLESS you want to spend the first day of 2005 behind bars, celebrate New Year's Eve without burning tires.

Or so the National Capital Region Police Office (NCRPO) warns.

In a memorandum, the NCRPO ordered its men in the five police districts in the metropolis to arrest persons caught burning tires on the streets.

Many people burn tires to light powerful firecrackers notwithstanding the risks that it poses.

Aside from the risk of the sparks triggering fires, thick smoke from burning tires can also blur the view of motorists and cause accidents.

Heat generated by the tires can lead to cracks on the street pavement.

Also, prolonged exposure to fumes produced by burning tires is a health hazard.

"There are safer ways to welcome the New Year," said Manila Mayor Lito Atienza in a statement.

A burning rubber tire or a drum traditionally serve as instant "lighters," onto which a firecracker need only be thrown to explode. But, as in past years, Atienza dissuaded the city's residents from this practice, calling it an environment hazard, too.

Police would be deployed to arrest those who would be caught disobeying the mayor's order.

In northern Metro Manila, police will patrol neighborhoods and arrest violators, Northern Police District Director Noe Wong said.

Wong asked residents to report to the police if they see persons burning tires in their communities.

Malabon City police chief Josefino Teofisto said he already formed teams to go after people who would fire guns indiscriminately, use illegal firecrackers or burn tires tonight.

NCRPO Director Avelino Razon Jr. earlier said the police would go after peddlers of unauthorized powerful firecrackers.

Until last night, the police had yet to report any arrests.

Among the firecrackers considered illegal are *bawang*, whistle bomb, *pla-pla*, super *lolo* and *lolo* thunder.

Last year, government officials also warned the public about the dangers of using very powerful firecrackers. The police had also vowed to go after peddlers of unauthorized explosives.

However, unauthorized firecrackers still found their way to the streets and more than 800 people all over the country were reported injured from December 2003 to January 2004 because of firecrackers.

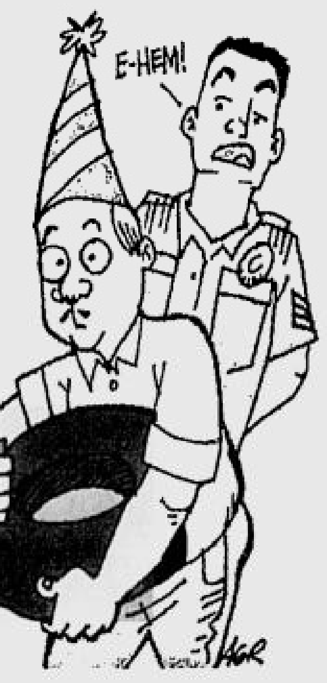
Instead of lighting up firecrackers, a practice believed to drive away negative energy to usher in an optimistic new year, Atienza encouraged his constituents to go basic: bang pots and pans.

"It's better to be safe than sorry. You certainly don't want to spend the first few days of the year recuperating from burns and blast wounds," he said.

Apart from responding to fires anticipated to ignite when the city welcomes the new year, teams from the Bureau of Fire Protection in Manila would be roving city streets on the lookout for burning tires and other flammable materials to readily put them out.

City Hall said the four city-owned hospitals—Ospital ng Maynila, Ospital ng Tondo, Ospital ng Sampaloc and Gat Andres Bonifacio Medical Center—are ready to handle emergency situations.

"Our hospitals are on full alert and would be ready to treat burn and blast victims. We have a full complement of doctors and other health professionals to provide treatment," said Atienza.



Mayors remind citizens to be safe in greeting New Year

By Leila B. Salaverria, Margaux C. Ortiz, Nancy C. Carvajal and Tina G. Santos

WHY SPEND on firecrackers and put your life or limb at risk when there is a free, safer and more festive alternative?

Revelers may greet the New Year in Makati or Manila, where local governments have prepared shows in the sky.

Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay is encouraging residents to attend the city's special countdown party at the corner of Paseo de Roxas and Ayala Avenues where they can welcome 2005 safe from firecracker-related injuries.

"The Makati countdown will be the best and the safest New Year's Eve party in the country, and we promise the people of Makati and other localities a one-of-a-kind fireworks show that will be hard to top," Binay said in a statement.

Merrymaking in Makati will include a street party starting at sunset and a laser light show during a 60-second countdown to the New Year followed by a 15-minute fireworks display.

The local government has declared the Makati Central Business District a firecracker-free zone.

"Using fireworks that are allowed is okay, but why do they have to spend money for it when they can watch the pyrotechnics over Manila Bay?" Western Police District (WPD) director Chief Supt. Pedro Bulaong said in an interview.

He said all members of the WPD, save those on duty, could join the celebration at the Baywalk organized by the Manila City government in cooperation with TV station GMA 7.

The fireworks display over Manila Bay is expected to last for 30 minutes. There will also be concerts while waiting for the countdown to 2005.

Bulaong also called on Manila residents to attend the festivities.

"They would be safe at the Baywalk because there would be a lot of policemen guarding the area and ensuring the safety of revelers," he said.

The WPD is also aiming for zero incidents of policemen firing their guns and has put tape over the muzzles of the firearms.

Las Piñas Mayor Imelda Aguilar, Taguig Mayor Sigfrido Tinga and Muntinlupa Mayor Jaime Fresnedi designated firecracker zones in their respective localities as they urged their constituents to be safe in welcoming 2005.

The Philippine Pyrotechnic Manufacturers and Dealers Association said safety could be ensured by following certain rules in handling firecrackers. (*See box.*)

For its part, the Bureau of Fire Protection placed its men on high alert for possible fires.

SA PAGHAKBANG

MEMBERS of a canine unit of the PNP Regional Special Action Unit patrol the Blumentritt station of the LRT.

ERIK ARAZAS

HOW TO USE FIRECRACKERS SAFELY

- DO NOT let children set off firecrackers. Guide them in using *luces* and sparklers.
- Do not use hands in setting off firecrackers. Use lighting equipment with long handles.
- Use firecrackers in spacious and safe areas where there are no electrical wires, flammable liquid and other combustible materials.
- Do not attempt to set off firecrackers when drunk.
- Place special firecrackers such as fountains, *pailaw* and *luces* in sand-filled containers for support.
- Do not attempt to rekindle defective firecrackers. Wait for 15 to 20 minutes before dousing water on the damaged firecracker.
- Do not pick up used firecrackers.
- Be sure to douse with water places where firecrackers have been lit.

Sta. Rosa hosts sky 'concert'

TO USHER in the new year with a bang this New Year's Eve, the Enchanted Kingdom, the Philippines' only world-class theme park, ups the splendor of its fireworks by providing a double treat for yearend revelers.

Fireworks of Enchanted Kingdom is the highlight of a visit to the park. Capping a day of wholesome fun and enjoyment, the aerial display lights up the Sta. Rosa, Laguna skies—leaving spectators in awe.

Aptly titled "A Concert in the Sky," a full four-minute show enthralls the audience with an awesome glow of colors forming various patterns, choreographed to the theme park's music, "Everyday, Everyday."

For every show, the theme park lights up approximately 350 to 400 shells of fireworks which takes no less than two hours to set up.

For three years now, Enchanted Kingdom, which has used supreme quality fireworks, has been the only Filipino fireworks presenter invited as a finalist to the Macau International Fireworks Festival, the biggest fireworks competition in the world.

The EK team has been earning accolades, not just from the audience, but also from organizers and fellow competitors.

Enchanted Kingdom is located in the city of Santa Rosa, Laguna. From now until Jan. 2, the park is open from 10 a.m. to 12 midnight, with fireworks at 10 p.m.

For more details, call 843-6070 to 78; 830-2111 to 16, or visit the EK website at : www.enchanted-kingdom.com.ph.

Mandaluyong organizes seniors

By Ruth L. Navarra

MANDALUYONG has decided that the best way to resolve issues concerning its senior citizens is to manage all of them under one organization.

The Federation of Senior Citizens of Mandaluyong (FSCAM) was updated so that it will have a more systematic way of coordinating with its members. This was decided after several meetings with the chairs and officials of the city's 16 barangays.

The organization of the FSCAM will begin at the barangay level.

Each barangay will form a chapter complete with its own officers who will look after their members.

Election of officers have started in the different barangays.

Only members who are residents of a barangay and have a valid senior citizens ID may be elected as an officer. The members must elect from the candidates to fill the 11 directorial positions in their chapter.

Senior citizens who are not residents of a barangay are allowed to vote.

Elected officials, except the public relations officer, automatically become board members of FSCAM. The presidents become the official representatives of the chapters. From there, they must elect another 11 officers to make up FSCAM's executive committee.

The organization has released 309 senior citizens IDs, which allow them to avail of discounts in different establishments and transport in the country.

No restful slumber for this family

By Leila B. Salaverria

A FAMILY who lay in deep slumber at a sidewalk off Roxas Boulevard in Manila was attacked by three men armed with knives and lead pipes early yesterday morning.

Dominador Cantay, 44, died after he was stabbed several times by the suspects.

The armed men did not spare three children from the attack, including Cantay's 2-year-old son AJ who was stabbed on the left arm.

Elward Concepcion, 15, was stabbed twice on the back, while his brother Lorenzo, 10, was hit on the head with a pipe.

The Concepcions are the sons of Cantay's live-in partner, Jessica, from a previous marriage who had come to visit her for the holidays.

The suspects were identified only as Jun Galis, a parking lot attendant at Roxas Boulevard, and two peanut vendors whose names were not immediately available.

Investigation by SPO2 Ed Ko showed that Galis, for no apparent reason, allegedly hit Lorenzo on the head while the latter was walking along Roxas Boulevard on Dec. 29.

Cantay later confronted Galis about the incident. After a heated argument, the two engaged in a fist fight that was stopped when cooler heads intervened.

But while Cantay and the family were sleeping on the sidewalk at the corner of Aldecoa Street and Roxas Boulevard, the three armed men allegedly arrived and attacked the family. The suspects then escaped toward Mabini Street. The wounded family members were rushed to the Ospital ng Maynila, where Cantay was later declared dead.

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BASKETBALL: NBA–Heat vs Pistons; 9 a.m. (r-9 p.m.); Star Sports; Spurs vs Blazers; 11:30 a.m. (r-9 p.m.); Solar Sports–Miami and Detroit tangle in a clash of eastern heavyweights while San Antonio visits Portland.

US NCAA–Gonzaga vs Missouri; 9 a.m. (r-3:30 p.m.); ESPN–It's dogs against cats as the Tigers host the Bulldogs.

Schedules subject to change without prior notice.

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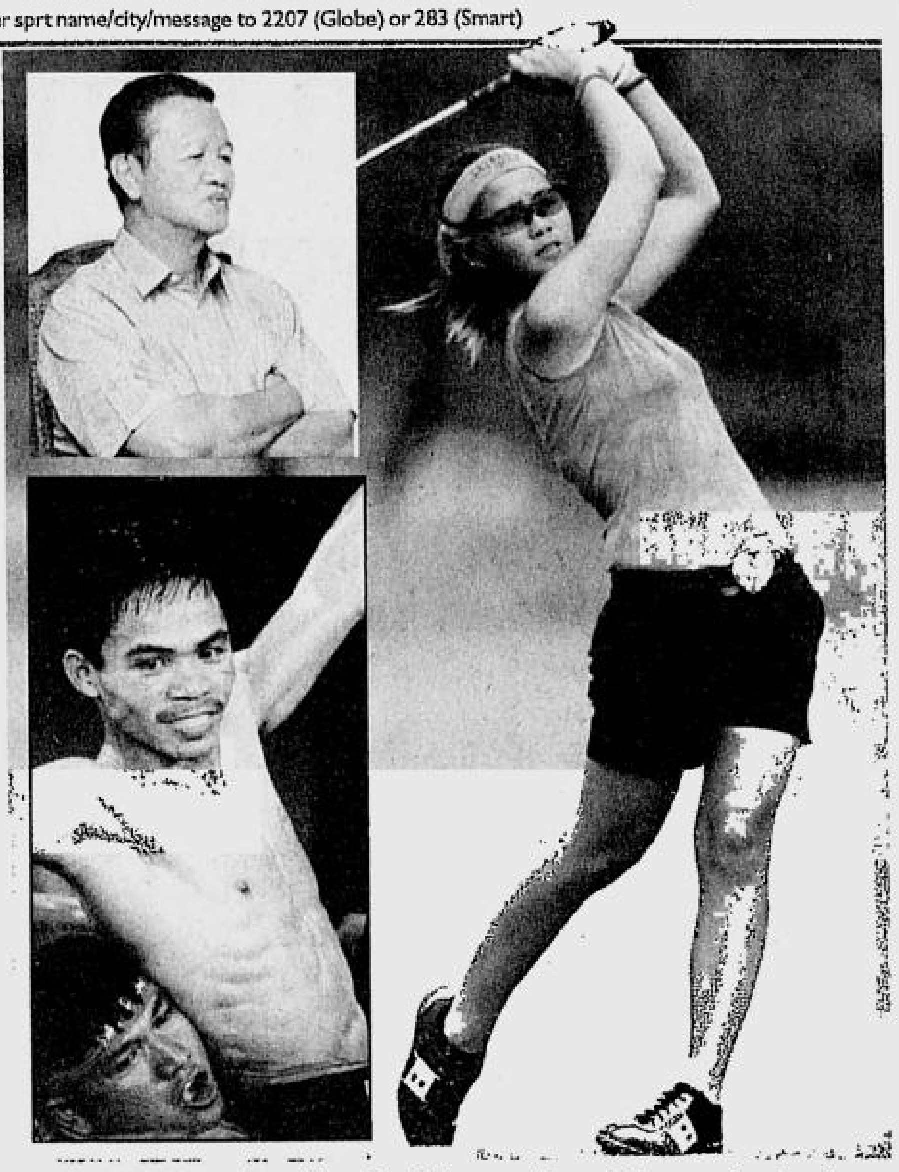
Cojuangco PSA Awards main guest



ROSALES and Pacquiao will receive their awards from Cojuangco (top inset).

INCOMING Philippine Olympic Committee (POC) president Jose "Peping" Cojuango will be the guest of honor when the Philippine Sportswriters Association (PSA) fetes the top achievers of 2004 during its Annual Awards Night at the Manila Pavilion on Jan. 13.

Cojuangco's appearance in the 90-minute program that starts at 7:30 p.m. marks the first time he will be guesting in the blue-ribbon event since being elected as head of the country's Olympic governing body.

The former Tarlac congressman accompanied her daughter, Mikee Cojuango-Jaworski, to last year's awards night. Mikee was named Sportswoman of the Year by the PSA in 2002 for winning a gold medal in equestrian during the Asian Games in Busan.

The presence of Cojuangco is expected to add prestige to the affair sponsored by Red Bull, Agfa Colors, Photokina, Pagcor, San Miguel Beer, the Philippine Sports Commission, Accel and Manila Mayor Lito Atienza with NBN-4 as its official carrying station.

Cojuangco will personally present the awards to the more than 70 honorees led by golfer Jennifer Rosales and boxer Manny Pacquiao.

Rosales and Pacquiao have been bestowed the highest accolade by the PSA body. They were named Sportswoman and Sportsman of the Year, respectively.

Also high on the honor roll are special awards recipients Alex Pagulayan, who won the 2004 World Pool Championship, and Olympians Mary Antoinette Rivero and Jasmine Figueroa, whose gutsy stands in the Athens Games proved to be the highlight of the Philippine delegation's campaign in the quadrennial meet.

Other achievers include four-time Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) Most Valuable Player Alvin Patrimonio (Presidential Award) and major awardees Mark Paragua and Nelson Mariano (chess), Liza del Rosario (bowling), Efren "Bata" Reyes and Francisco "Django" Bustamante (billiards), Rhyan Tanguilig (cycling), Gabriel Espinas (amateur basketball) and Pati Dilema (horseracing) and Angelo Que (golf).

Promising chesser Wesley So is the recipient of the Tony Siddayao Award while former POC president and Cojuangco predecessor Celso Dayrit will will receive the Leadership Award.

Four great athletes of another time will be elevated to the PSA Hall of Fame, namely Mona Solaiman and Lydia de Vega-Mercado (athletics) and Caloy Loyzaga and Lauro Mumar (basketball).

The other awardees:

Citations

Randy Sulco (boxing), Gaby dela Merced (karting), Chot Reyes (basketball), Matteo Guidicelli, Michelle Bumgarner (karting), Don Bosco, Glenn Aguilar (motocross), AR Ramos (golf), Anjou Jellicoe Mauricio (X-Games), Yolanda Mendigoria (powerlifting), Juvic Pagunsan (golf), Enrique Rafael Rosales (powerlifting), BEST Center, Henry Dagmil (athletics), Tagaytay City, Marichi Gandionco (swimming), Kenneth San Andres (motocross) Miguel Tabuena (golf), JR Gonzales (golf), Totoy Tingzon (baseball), Hermie Esguerra (horseracing) Ato Badolato, (basketball), Jayvie Agojo (golf) Rene Catalan (wushu), Roy Vence (athletics), RP archery team, Arvin Ting (wushu), Tyson Sy (AF3), Solar Sports Rudy Salud (boxing)

Posthumous

Boy Arazas (basketball) Agustin Cailao, Fely Fajardo (basketball), Purita Negal Jacinto (softball), Faustino Medina, Camilo "Boy" Mendez, Ernie Singson, Teddy Alfarero (basketball), Rudy Samson (golf), Freddie Deen (darts), Domingo Itchon (basketball)

Outstanding NSAs

Taekwondo, Badminton

RP coach's tenure not etched in stone

By June Navarro

NOTHING'S permanent except change.

PBA commissioner Noli Eala said this yesterday as he explained the pro league's stance on the tenure of the national team coach.

EALA: Performance

Eala said the national coach—already picked but unannounced as yet—by the Philippine Basketball Association can stay at the helm as long as he performs well with the team.

Former RP team coach Tim Cone of Alaska, Joel Banal of Talk 'N Text, Chot Reyes of Coca-Cola and Yeng Guiao of Red Bull Barako are the only candidates for the post.

As the country embarks on a four-year basketball program to regain its lofty status in the Asian scene, Eala said the national coach should be willing to step down if he fails to meet expectations.

"The first year is going to be very crucial," said Eala. "That's why one of the conditions is, the coach should be willing to resign if he does not live up to expectations."

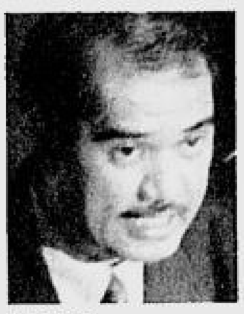
Eala said the league has not set parameters to measure the success of the national coach.

The commissioner will present his choice to the PBA board of governors during a special meeting on Tuesday.

The national coach will handle the RP teams competing in two Asian Basketball Confederation championships in 2005 and 2007.

The coach will form the team, composed primarily of PBA stars, to also represent the country in the ABC Champions Cup and the Jones Cup.

Next year's ABC Championship in Doha, Qatar, serves as a qualifier for the 2006 World Championships in Saitama, Japan. The 2007 edition will give the top two teams berths to the 2008 Beijing Olympics.



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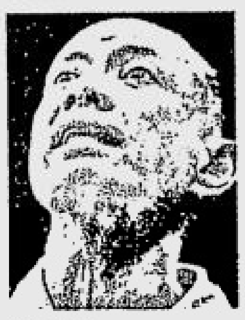

GUIAO

IM Sanchez nears Nice chess title

SANCHEZ: Half-point lead

FILIPINO International Master Joseph Sanchez took the scalp of Croatian Grandmaster Nenad Sulava with the black pieces yesterday to grab the solo lead after the sixth and penultimate round of the 20th Nice Open yesterday at the Le Grand Hotel Aston in Nice, France.

With one round to go, Sanchez, the 34-year-old native of Cebu City with a modest Elo rating of 2430, now has 5.5 points.

He stood a precarious half-point in front of erstwhile solo leader GM Vladimir Ephishin of Russia and six others in the Swiss system tournament that lured 186 players from the European circuit.

The top-seeded Ephishin (Elo 2599) settled for back-to-back draws with GM Hicham Hamdouchi (Elo 2575) and French IM Sebastien Maze in the fifth and sixth rounds, respectively, to be at 5.0 points.

Ephishin shared second to seventh places with Hamdouchi, Maze, French IM Aurelien Dunis, Julien Lamorelle and Herve Ribreau.

Sanchez moved up in the standings by outplaying French master Fabien Libiszewski in the fifth round.

In today's final round, Sanchez will play white against Hamdouchi needing a sixth victory to clinch the title outright.

A draw with the second-seeded Hamdouchi—coupled with a win by any one from among Ephishin, Maze, Dunis, Lamorelle and Ribreau in the last round—will complicate matters for the Filipino.

Organizers will resolve ties for the championship via the tiebreak. *Marlon Bernardino, Contributor*

Nine stakes races highlight 'Pasasalamat'

NINE stakes races are on tap as the Manila Jockey Club bids farewell to the year 2004 today with the year's last major racing event, the Philracom's "Yearend Pasasalamat Sa Industriya ng Karera" at the San Lazaro Leisure Park in Carmona, Cavite.

Dangling a total prize money of P1.8 million, the stakes races—the Trainers Cup, Jockeys Cup, Marho Cup, Philtobo Cup, Klub Don Juan de Manila Cup, OTB Operators Cup, Pinoy Racing Cup, Manila Jockey Club Inc. and the Philippine Racing Club Inc. Cup— are actually part of an action-packed 13-race program.

"We are honored to host Philracom's yearend thanksgiving races for the whole racing industry," said MJCI chair and chief executive officer Alfonso R. Reyno Jr.

"This will be a fitting send-off for a great year of successful racing events."

Reyno said the industry recognizes the contributions of the *bayang karerista*, Philracom officials, the horseowners, trainers, jockeys and OTB operators to the success of horse racing in the country.

A guaranteed prize of P200,000 awaits the winner in each stakes race.

Today's races start at 12:30 p.m.

Fireworks will light up the air over the hippodrome as soon as the races end.

The MJCI has also scheduled a 14-race card, highlighted by the "Emperador Cup," on the first day of the new racing season on Sunday. Emperador Brandy is sponsoring the race organized by the Rotary Club of Biak na Bato-District 3780-Quezon City.

Gonzales clears knock-out bar for Hastings tilt

LONE Filipino entry International Master Jayson Gonzales defeated Ronald Harman of England on Wednesday to join the first-round survivors in the 80th Hastings Chess Congress in England.

The 33-year-old Philippine Army enlisted man matched the feats of defending champion GM Vassilios Kotronias of Greece, 15-year-old Chinese whiz kid Li Wu, Polish GM Bartosz Socko, Russian GM Vladimir Belov, English GM Mark Hebden and Raymond Kaufman of the United States.

Eighty-four players are taking part under the Hastings format, where only 20 players are eliminated after round one. The rest go into a Swiss competition. *Marlon Bernardino, Contributor*

ALL-FILIPINO WARS

Puyat Sports president Aristeo "Putch" Puyat (second from left) signs the agreement for the staging of the P1-million All-Filipino Best of the Best Billiards Open during a press conference at Coronado Lanes in Makati yesterday. With him are (from left) Efren "Bata" Reyes, IBC 13 chair Philip Juico and Jemah Television chair Marc Roces. The round of 16 of the tournament, where Reyes and seven other cue masters have been seeded, will be held from Feb. 21-27. It will be telecast live over IBC 13. The winner will receive P600,000. RYAN LIM

Tigresses look invincible as Final 4 battles heat up

WITH defending champion University of Santo Tomas seemingly invincible at the top, the battle for the last three semifinal berths in the Shakey's V-League second conference will be a toss-up among the rest of the teams.

The unbeaten Tigresses, thanks to top attacker Roxanne Pimentel, are gunning for a sweep of the double-round elimination and the first slot in the semifinals of the tournament sponsored by Shakey's Pizza.

Back-to-back UAAP champion La Salle and the veterans-laden Philippine Sports Commission, however, are hot in pursuit with 3-1 and 4-2 win-loss cards, respectively.

Lyceum and Letran, both toting 2-3 cards, as well as San Sebastian and Far Eastern are also tipped to make the final grind for the Final Four seats interesting.

The top four teams after the 12-game elimination round advance to the semifinals, with No. 1 taking on No. 4 and No. 2 facing No. 3 in best-of-three match duels.

Action resumes on Tuesday at the Rizal Coliseum with the España-based UST tossers tackling the Lady Stags at 3 p.m. and the Lady Pirates battling the Lady Archers at 5 p.m. in the tournament co-presented by Dunkin Donuts, HBC Home of Beauty Exclusives, Smart and PLDT with Mikasa and Accel as official volleyball and outfitter, respectively.

STANDINGS	W	L
UST	5	0
La Salle	3	1
PSC	4	2
Lyceum	2	3
Letran	2	3
SSC	1	4
FEU	1	5

GAMES TUESDAY
(Rizal Coliseum)
3 p.m.—UST vs SSC
5 p.m.—Lyceum vs La Salle

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Tracy, Yao stand out as Rockets whip Cavs

CLEVELAND—Tracy McGrady scored 34 points, Yao Ming added 20 and the Houston Rockets didn't have to contend with LeBron James after halftime during a 98-87 win over the Cleveland Cavaliers.

James didn't play Wednesday night after bruising a bone near his left eye when he was accidentally struck by Houston's Dikembe Mutombo late in the first half. James was coming off a 40-point performance at Atlanta on Tuesday. He scored just three before being hurt Wednesday night.

Drew Gooden led Cleveland with 21 points and 12 rebounds.

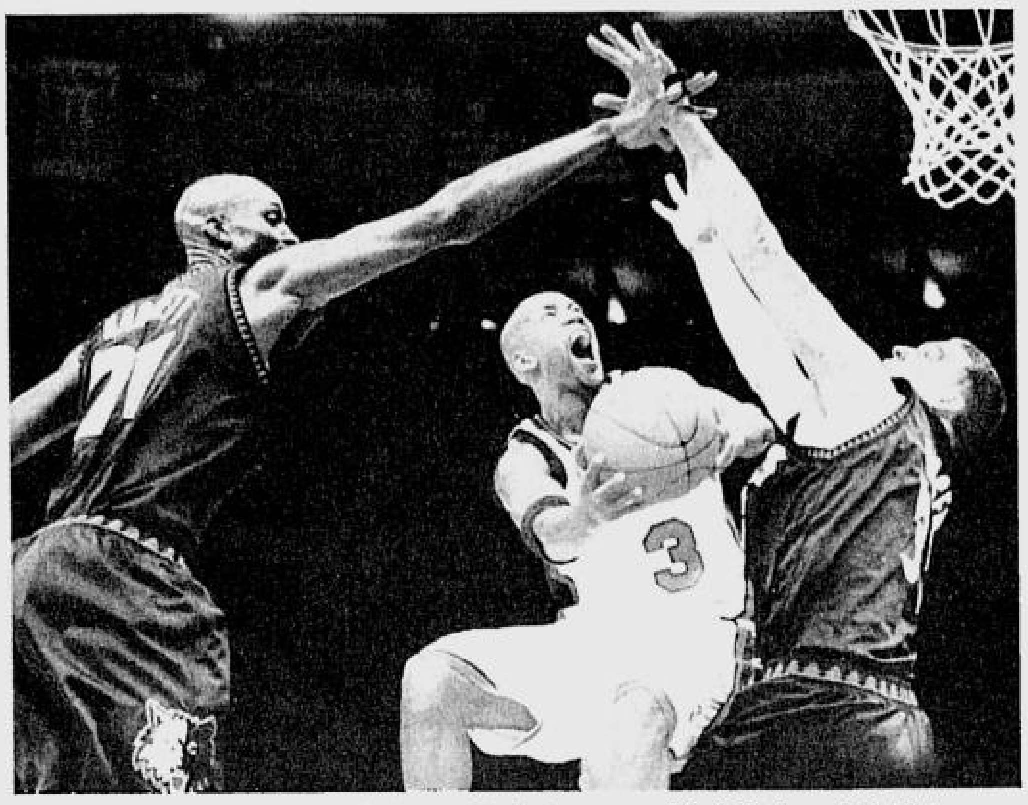
In Charlotte, North Carolina, Jermaine O'Neal had 24 points and 17 rebounds as Indiana beat Charlotte, 74-71. The Pacers won back-to-back for the second time this month.

In the three games he's played since an arbitrator reduced his 25-game suspension to 15, O'Neal has 61 points and 35 rebounds. He will go before a federal judge Thursday in New York, to learn if he can continue to play or must sit out the final 10 games of the suspension for his part in the Pacers-Pistons brawl last month.

Emeka Okafor had his 17th consecutive double-double with 16 points and 15 rebounds for Charlotte.

In Washington, Chauncey Billups hit a 14-foot jumper with 0.7 seconds left to give Detroit a come-from-behind 107-105 victory over Washington.

The Pistons overcame a 19-point first-half deficit and trailed by as many as 15 in the third quarter. Billups scored 10 of his season-high 32 points in the final five minutes, and Rasheed Wallace had 12 of his 23 in the final quarter.



KNICKS' Stephon Marbury (3) challenges Kevin Garnett and Mark Madsen of the Wolves.

Gilbert Arenas scored 34 points, and Larry Hughes had 30 to go with seven assists and six steals for the Wizards.

In Orlando, Florida, Michael Redd scored 29 points and short-handed Milwaukee got 15 points and a career-high 14 rebounds from Dan Gadzuric to beat Orlando, 111-105.

The Bucks had only 11 players in uniform because of injuries. Desmond Mason added 21 points. Steve Francis nearly had a triple-double for Orlando with 24 points, 12 rebounds and nine assists. Grant Hill added 26 points for the Magic, undone by 23 turnovers. *AP*

Complete results:

Houston 98, Cleveland 87; Milwaukee 111, Orlando 105; Detroit 107, Washington 105; Indiana 74, Charlotte 71; NY Knicks 100, Minnesota 87; Phoenix 107, New Orleans 96; Memphis 117, Boston 109; Golden State 111, Toronto 105; LA Clippers 101, Utah 90.

Hermie's impeccable record speaks for itself

CLEAN LIVING

Manolo R. Iñigo

HERMIE Esguerra, popular owner of super horse Wind Blown, will be honored by the Philippine Sportswriters Association for his unparalleled success and contribution to Philippine horse racing during the annual PSA Awards Night at the Manila Pavilion on Jan. 13.

A sports benefactor held in high esteem in the community, Esguerra has donated proceeds of his record winnings not only to the industry's major players like jockeys, trainers, grooms and stable hands, but also to our national athletes, sports associations and victims of the killer typhoons which devastated the country recently.

The Philippine Racing Commission has also recognized Esguerra as today's leading horse owner, whose stable has set unprecedented achievements in recent racing history.

Still, success did not come easy for this dapper businessman from Plaridel, Bulacan.

"When I go into something, I really work had to excel," he said. "I study very hard to know everything about the sport, from the training of horses, to treating their injuries and, most recently, breeding of top-caliber race horses."

Esguerra launched his checkered racing career in 1999 when he bought two horses—King Air and Tomahawk—from veteran racing man Antonio Floirendo and another—Anahaw—from his friend, Eric Tagle.

"I just wanted to find a new diversion at the start," he recalled, "but I really got serious with my involvement in racing in 2001 when I acquired Wind Blown, then already a champion horse, from Sandy Javier.

After he acquired Wind Blown and around 60 other horses at that time, Esguerra felt it was necessary to set up his own farm. "I used to spell my horses with racing buddies Putch (Marho president Aristeo Puyat) and Mari (Jose Mari Franco)," said Esguerra, whose other favorite sports are golf and basketball. But soon after, he found a place in Lipa City, Batangas, where he established the modern Herma Farms, the new home to the phenomenal Wind Blown, who is now retired to stud.

"I have found fulfillment," he said on his latest venture, the breeding of race horses, stressing that his next biggest goal is to produce champion horses in the mold of Wind Blown. Now 8 years old, Wind Blown (Hazam out of Wind in my Hair) has won an all-time record high of P18,978,695.50 in 49 starts, with 36 wins, 24 in stakes races.

***

LETTER TO PRESIDENT ARROYO. Former Philippine Olympic Committee president and sports critique Julian Malonso has written President Macapagal-Arroyo regarding the sorry state of Philippine sports.

A firm follower of the Olympic movement, the 81-year-old Malonso said, "The present set-up of sports in the Philippines is the making of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos," claiming that Marcos had wanted to make sports as one of his means to stay as president of the Philippines for as long as he lives by appointing his favorite Australian nephew, Mike Keon, as sports czar. Marcos also appointed his cronies to the different sports associations, undermining the duly elected officials of the national sports associations, including the National Olympic Committee (NOC), now the Philippine Olympic Committee (POC).

Marcos abolished the Philippine Amateur Athletic Federation, leading to the creation of the Philippine Sports Commission (PSC), which Malonso said is arrogating the powers and duties of the POC, the body recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

To remedy this unsettling situation, Malonso has appealed to President Arroyo to appoint the acclaimed POC president as PSC chair for economy and sound management. "The only way to save Philippine sports is to have only one person run the national sports program," he said.

***

Here's wishing everybody a peaceful and prosperous New Year.

SPORTSWATCH

Pascua, Batulan top chessfest

HARIDAS Pascua, an 11-year-old wonder from Mangatarem, Pangasinan, and Mariel Batulan, a 9-year-old discovery from the City of San Fernando, emerged as boys and girls overall champions, respectively, in the recent Rimat ti amianan Kiddies Chess Championships at the City of San Fernando, La Union. Pascua had a perfect record in the six-round, 14 and under tournament supported by La Union Gov. Victor F. Ortega and San Fernando City Mayor Mary Jane C. Ortega. Batulan scored five points in the event organized by engineer Joseph A. Dumuk. The other champions are Roosenicole Ducusin (B-14), Jan Emmanuel Garcia (B-10), Medy Vidal (G-14) and Allen Nikki Subang (G-12).

NBTC classes begin Jan. 8

THE FIRST semester of the 2005 National Basketball Training Center (NBTC) classes opens on Jan. 8 and will run until May 25. The NBTC, which holds Saturday classes only at the RFM Sports center, adopts a strict one-to-six coach-student ratio and has already started to accept registrants. Applications may be coursed through the NBTC secretariat at 628-65-20, 641-56-16 or 0917 628-84-31.

Roligon cockers form Filcobra

A NEW cockers and breeders group, based at Roligon Mega Cockpit, was formed three weeks ago. Named the Filipino Cockers and Breeders Association, Filcobra is led by an interim executive committee composed of Nanding Diaz of Capiz, Colonel Tabique, Benny Lado, Jimmy Machuca, Jerry Ang, Peter Uren, Edmund Yasay, lawyer Virgilo Manguerra and Dado Mitra. Filcobra members will compete in a 7-derby circuit that includes six one-day 4-cockers and one three-day 5-cock derby. The Season Starter 4-Cock Derby is set on Jan. 12 with a guaranteed cash prize of P300,000 for an entry fee of P7,700. Minimum bet is P5,500. Filcobra members include Rey Briones, William Go, James Uy, Blandy Tolentino, Cong. Pong Plaza, Charie Cristobal, Allan Siaco, Alex and Pol Derpo, Boy Marzo, lawyer Romero Yu, Lito Alcantara and engineer Meder Datu.

MITSUBISHI Motors president Kengo Takase (right) and Manila Southwoods Golf and Country Club chair Robert John Sobrepeña (2nd from left) hand over a symbolic key to Eugene Villanueva, grand raffle winner of the brand-new Mitsubishi Lancer GLX in the recent Chairman's Cup tournament. With them is Orlando Alvarez.

Phelps gets 18 months for intoxicated driving

SALISBURY, Maryland—Olympic swimming champion Michael Phelps was sentenced to 18 months' probation Wednesday after pleading guilty to drunken driving.

Judge Lloyd O. Whitehead granted Phelps probation before judgment, meaning his record will be expunged if he complies with the terms of probation. Phelps pleaded guilty to driving while impaired, and prosecutors dropped charges of driving under the influence, underage drinking and failure to stop at a stop sign.

The 19-year-old Phelps was fined $250 and ordered to pay $55 in court costs, must attend a meeting sponsored by Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and must give speeches to students at three local schools by June 1, advising them about making choices and warning them about the dangers of alcohol.

Whitehead also ordered Phelps to abstain from alcohol and illegal drugs during his probation. *AP*

Red Sox miracle voted top story

BOSTON—The Boston Red Sox's victory in the World Series for the club's first Major League Baseball title since 1918, and the unprecedented playoff comeback against the New York Yankees that made it possible, was selected the sports story of the year by the US newspaper and broadcast members of The Associated Press.

The Red Sox triumph was a runaway winner with 108 first-place votes and 1,325 points, beating out Lance Armstrong's sixth straight Tour de France title (seven first-place votes, 785 points) and the Indiana Pacers-Detroit Pistons brawl was third (six first-place votes, 662 points).

The New England Patriots' Super Bowl victory and 21-game National Football League winning streak was next (zero first-place votes, 498 points), followed by sports' steroid stories (eight first-place votes, 495 points).

Earlier this month, in a poll of worldwide subscribers, Greece's victory in soccer's European Championship was selected the top sports story, beating out the Summer Olympics, which was second.

Merely winning the US baseball title after an 86-year drought probably would have been enough to make the Red Sox the year's top story. But the Sox added drama to their title.

JASON Varitek rises to the occasion for the Boston Red Sox with game-winning runs. AFP

Despite playing .500 ball for most of the year, Boston swept the Anaheim Angels in the first round, with designated hitter David Ortiz—"Papi"—hitting a clinching homer in the 10th inning of Game 3. But the Red Sox just as quickly fell behind the Yankees 3-0 in the American League championship series.

No MLB team had ever rallied from a 3-0 deficit to even tie a seven-game series, let alone win it. But the Red Sox, rallied from 4-3 deficit in ninth inning of the fourth game to tie it and eventually won in the 12th.

It won the next three games to defeat the Yankees and rolled over the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series, prompting a victory parade that drew millions.

"Just about everywhere I go, people get very emotional. These people have been waiting a lot longer than I have," said Bill Mullaly, a 30-year-old Red Sox security guard who escorts the Commissioner's Trophy awarded to the World Series winners on many of its visits. "It's had a huge impact on people. It's made them feel good." *AP*

Triple A

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza

I HAVE this habit of greeting the New Year by digging up some words of wisdom. You know, I want to start the New Year right—if I could. I've always felt that whether famous or not, notorious or not, someone has been a master of his time, is a master of our time.

Let me begin by saying I have a Triple A on this, the day before the start of 2005. The first A is for Advice, second A for Age, and third A for Anger.

Each of them, I assure you, is good for the athlete, coach and manager. All of us, really.

So, get set, aim, fire!

Benjamin Franklin said, "He that won't be counseled can't be helped."

This one applies to all. To the athletes and those just starting out life, a career, take note.

If a newcomer thinks he knows everything, he is doomed.

If a sophomore thinks he knows half of what is to be learned, he will not be whole the rest of his life.

If a veteran thinks he is better than the coach, he will be retired sooner than expected.

Not even the best coach in the world knows everything. Phil Jackson, The Coach of the Nineties, was dumped in favor of Kobe "The Brat" Bryant. Coaching is not only about court strategy, it is also about coach-player relationship. Obviously, Phil has met his match in Kobe.

Bottom line is, we shouldn't stop hearing other people's advice. At the end of the day, the advice is but a guide. You decide after digesting the advice.

On Age, listen to Cato The Censor: "Become old early if you wish to stay old long."

Even the young can become old. It's a choice. And by old here, we mean living as if we are already old: wise to the ways of the world.

Not noisy but calm.

Not temperamental but cool.

Not judgmental but fair and level headed.

Not nasty but nice.

Life is a coma, never a period. We learn as we live.

An athlete learns many things from practice, and everything from the game.

A coach learns many things from a game, and everything from his players.

A worker learns many things from his boss, and everything from the job at hand.

On Anger, here's Pythagoras, my favorite since my high school days: "Anger always begins with folly, and ends with repentance."

How many times have we heard someone say, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do it."

There will always be anger in us. Human nature. But the challenge, really, is to put anger under check. Ron Artest, the non-artist from Indiana, must still be in repentance mode until now.

The trick is, always make the head in charge of the heart. The heart is prone to indiscretion and, therefore, the head must always be wary. For the head to work properly at all times, it must detach from the source of anger: heart.

Heart is passion and head is reason. That is the way to treat them both. In practical terms, separate them like oil and water. In ideal terms, conjoin them like horse and carriage for they also make a perfect match when correctly handled.

I grant that most of the time, the heart controls the head on matters of love. When it can't be helped and it happened, let's seek Divine intervention: May their passion be bound by reason.

In any case, when anger is at hand and licking it is as tempting as the apple in the garden, cling to Horace: "Anger is a short madness."

Which means that when we lose our cool, we should be quick to realize our madness. Apology must be done without delay.

And so, to those I have hurt in the year about to end, my sincerest apologies. Please forgive me.

Happy New Year!

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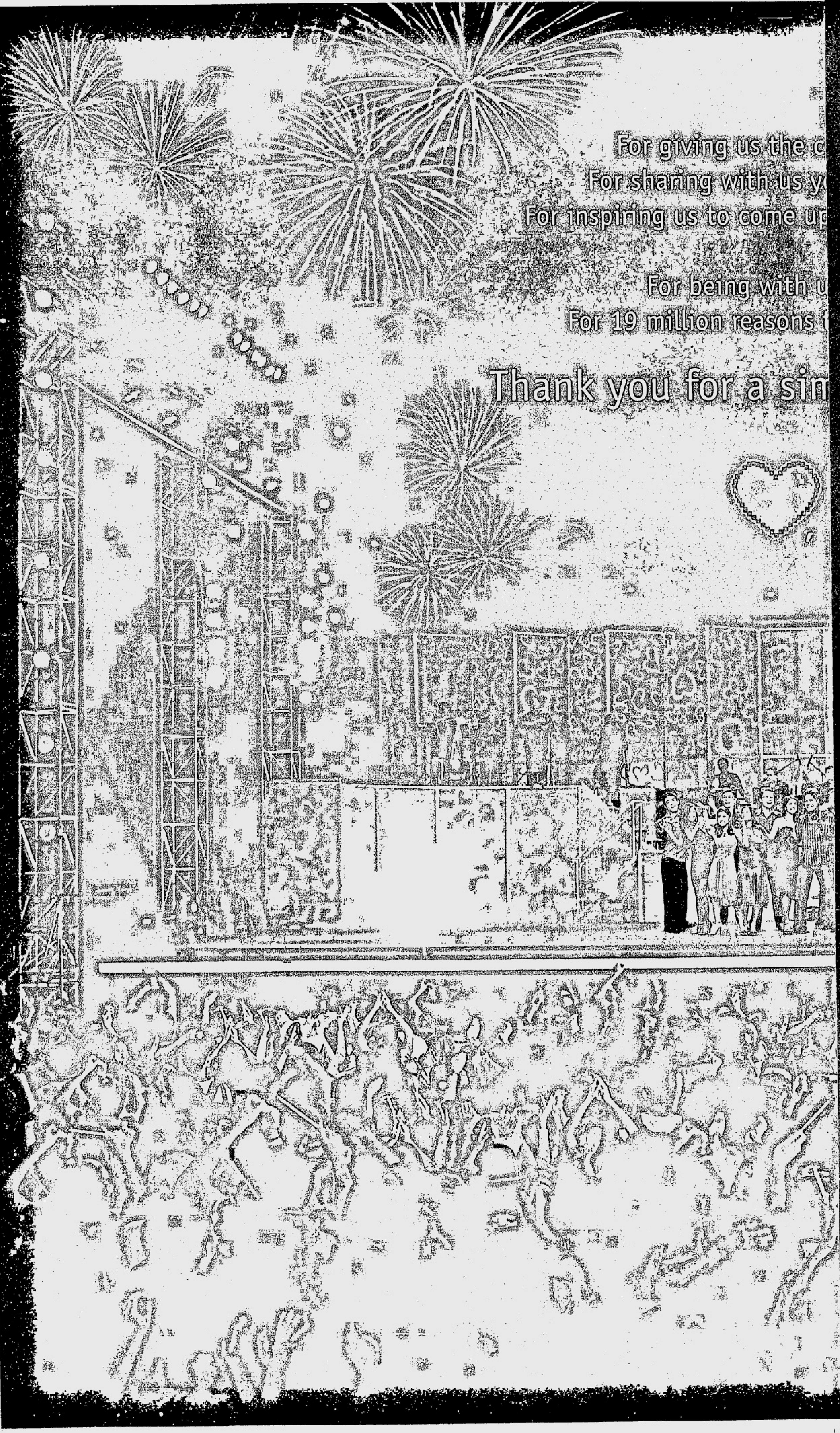

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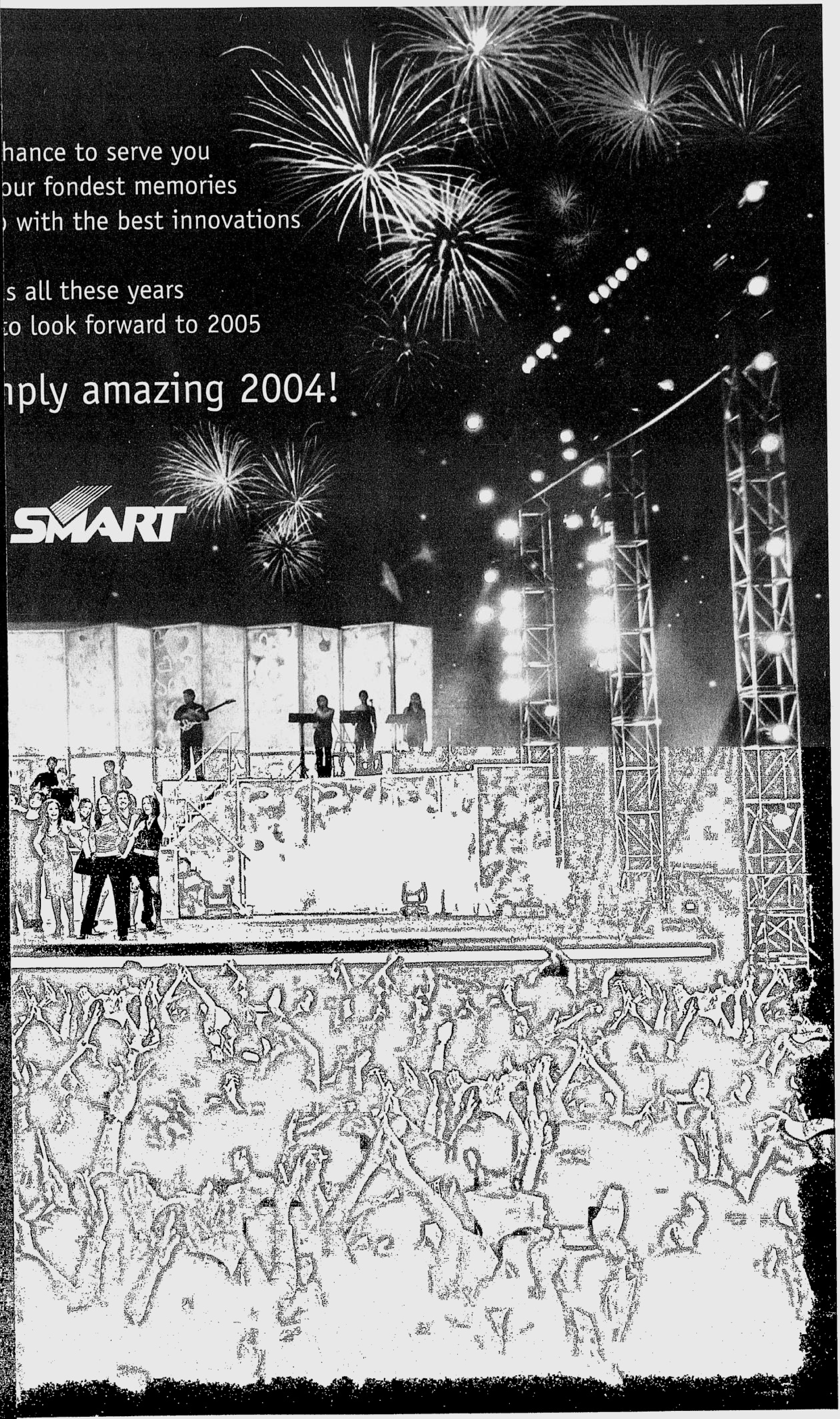

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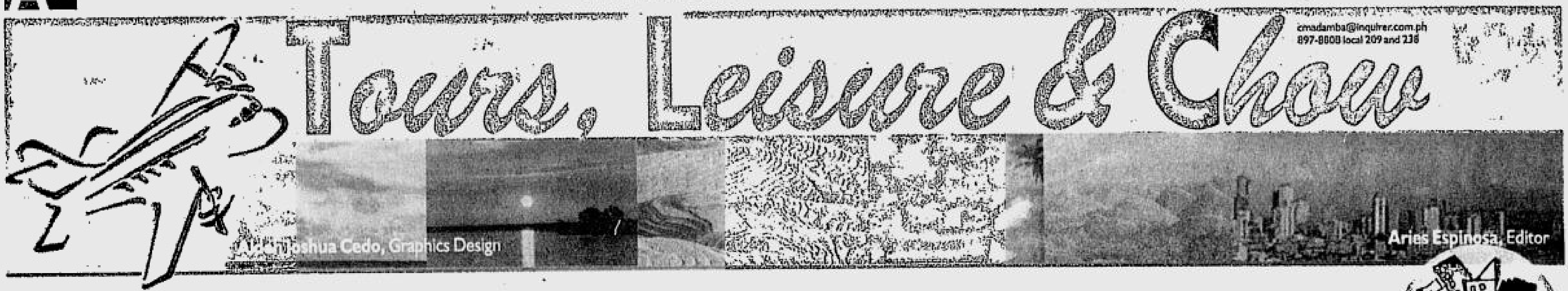

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Joshua Cedo, Graphics Design

Aries Espinosa, Editor

Ray of Hope: An outreach program by Somerset for the typhoon victims

WITH the onslaught of typhoons that has left the northern regions in a devastating state, Somerset Services Residences, Manila is launching Ray of Hope, an outreach project where staff and guests may make monetary contributions or donate clothes, blankets, food, medicine and other relief goods for the unfortunate victims of typhoons Winnie and Yoyong. The donation drive ran until Dec. 14 and proceeds will be given to the GMA "Kapuso" foundation.

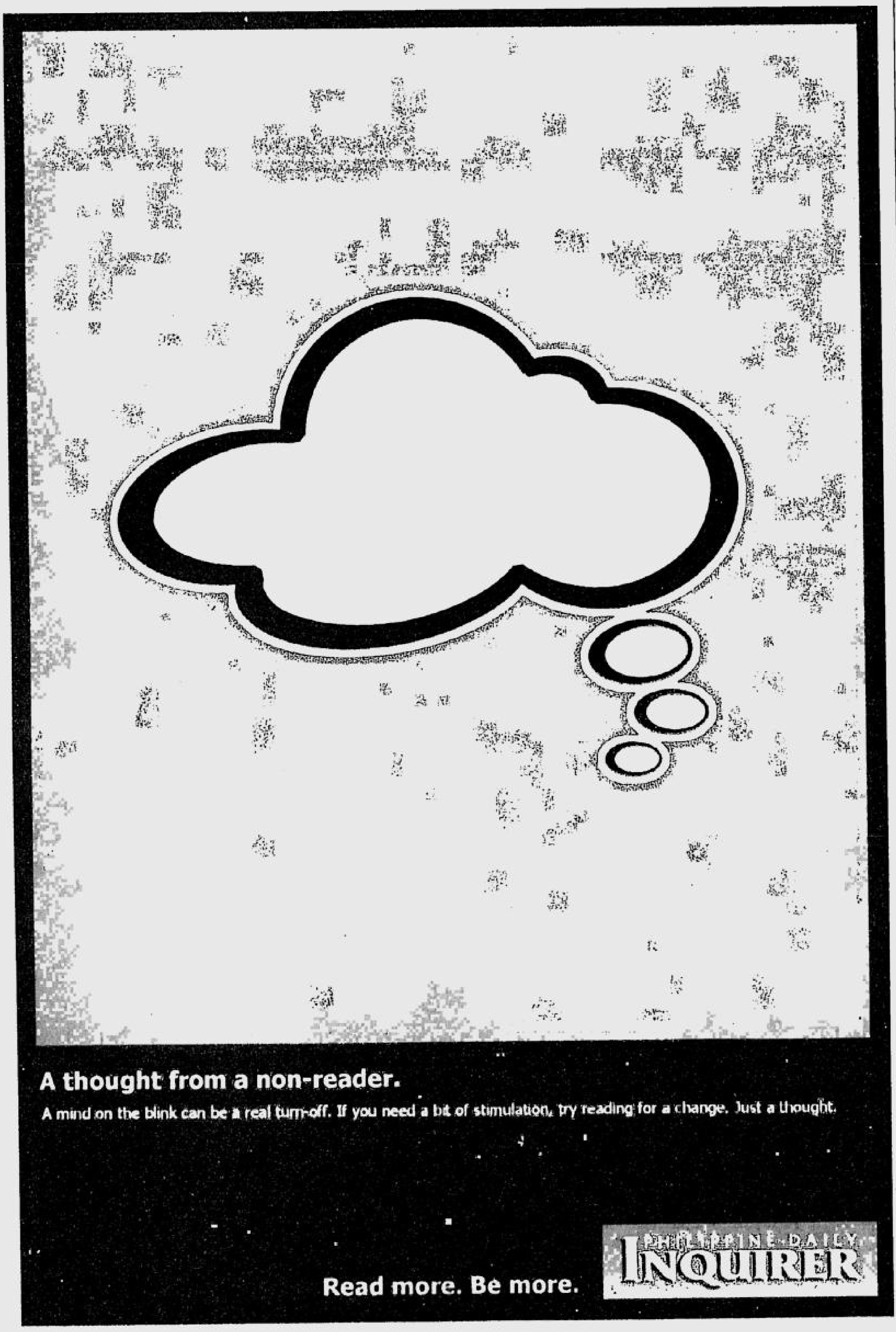
This initiative is in relation to the Ascott Heartware campaign where the staff and management continue to move towards an extraordinary impact by delivering a "touch from our hearts" experience.

An explosive New Year at Bellevue

LOOKING for a great way to start the New Year? Take your friends and family along to southern Metro Manila's largest and most modern concert venue, The Bellevue Grand Ballroom as it opens to the public for the first time tonight, Dec. 31. Mitch Valdes lends a one-of-a-kind performance only for this evening. Entrance fee of P750 net includes one standard drink. Greet 2005 with a bang with your loved ones close by only at The Bellevue Hotel, Alabang's fun family destination. Call 771-8181 local 8113 or 8107 for inquiries. The New Year's Countdown with Mitch Valdes is brought to you by BMW,

SMART, Pepsi, Nescafé Gold, 102.1 Crossover and The Philippine Daily Inquirer.

Greet 2005 with a bang with your loved ones close by only at The Bellevue Hotel, Alabang's fun family destination.



A thought from a non-reader.

A mind on the blink can be a real turn-off. If you need a bit of stimulation, try reading for a change. Just a thought.

Read more. Be more.

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Method to our mildness

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

OUR pieces on the acting and film appreciation workshops we conducted recently in Baguio have elicited invitations to hold similar seminars and courses in other parts of the country.

We've gladly acceded to such requests because we sense that, if the arts and media are to improve in this country, both practitioners and members of the audience have to raise their standards and expectations.

Our notes on acting have prompted some readers to ask for more details regarding the more dynamic and integral approach to characterization, emotion and performance that we espouse.

We agree with some readers who point out that our approach is different from standard acting workshop thrusts that require students to scream and thrash about to "express" themselves, and thus exorcise their private demons.

But we believe that there's method to our mildness, because we are trying to take workshoppers back, not to their elemental core, but to the essence of performance itself.

What do we mean by this? Well, many performers believe that, to portray a character well, they have to believably *pretend* to be like him. So, they write his detailed biography, list down his needs and behavioral tics, and proceed to move, think and feel "like" him.

We submit that this isn't the way to come up with a natural, credible and empathetic performance. The better way to do this is for the actor to realize that the character he's portraying isn't a real entity, he's just a name on a page of words penned by the scriptwriter.

The only real person on the stage or onscreen is—the actor himself! So, while his thoughts may be conditioned by what he knows about the character's essence and preferences, the emotions that result from those thoughts are the actor's alone.

So, instead of trying to feel happy or sad "like" the character, the actor has to feel those emotions *as himself*.

This distinction isn't easy for many people to understand and act upon, because it requires the actor to be completely honest about *his* emotions, and some performers don't want to go that far.

But actors have to take this extra step, so that their performances can go beyond "performance" itself, and enter the area of "being" that is so often talked about in the performing arts these days.

For our part, however, we regard "being" not as the acme of naturalistic acting, but as the end product of a step that some actors overlook: believing.

We submit that the best actors are those who are so focused and open to suggestion that they believe that whatever is supposed to happen to the character they're playing is actually taking place.

So, if the character is trapped in an imaginary earthquake, to the actor, the earthquake is real, and he physically reels from it.

If the character has received a very valuable gift, the *actor* is elated. If the character is fired from his job, the *actor* is crushed.

This is an important distinction, because the audience can empathize deeply with an actor only if the actor has stopped acting, and has gone on to the realm of believing and being.

Empathy is achieved only when the viewer forgets that he's watching a performance. When the acting is completely natural and authentically felt, it can work on the viewer's subconscious.

This is where he is most vulnerable, and where genuine, life-transforming empathetic changes can take place.

'Adventurous January'

BE IT futuristic or imaginary, heroic or whimsical, you can find the adventure to excite you on Cartoon Network this January.

Join the Brotherhood of Mutants in stopping Apocalypse's plan to destroy the planet in "X-Men Revolution" on weekends at 5 p.m., starting Jan. 2.

See how safe we are in "Duck Dodgers" in the 24th century in Fridays' Premiere starting Jan. 7 at 6 p.m.

Follow the adventures of Mac and Blooregard and the rest of the imaginary gang in their "real" world in "Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends" weekends at 9 a.m., starting Jan. 9.

Experience the nonstop action with enormous robots and evil aliens in the comedy-action-adventure cartoon "Megas XLR," on Sundays starting Jan. 9 at 7 p.m.

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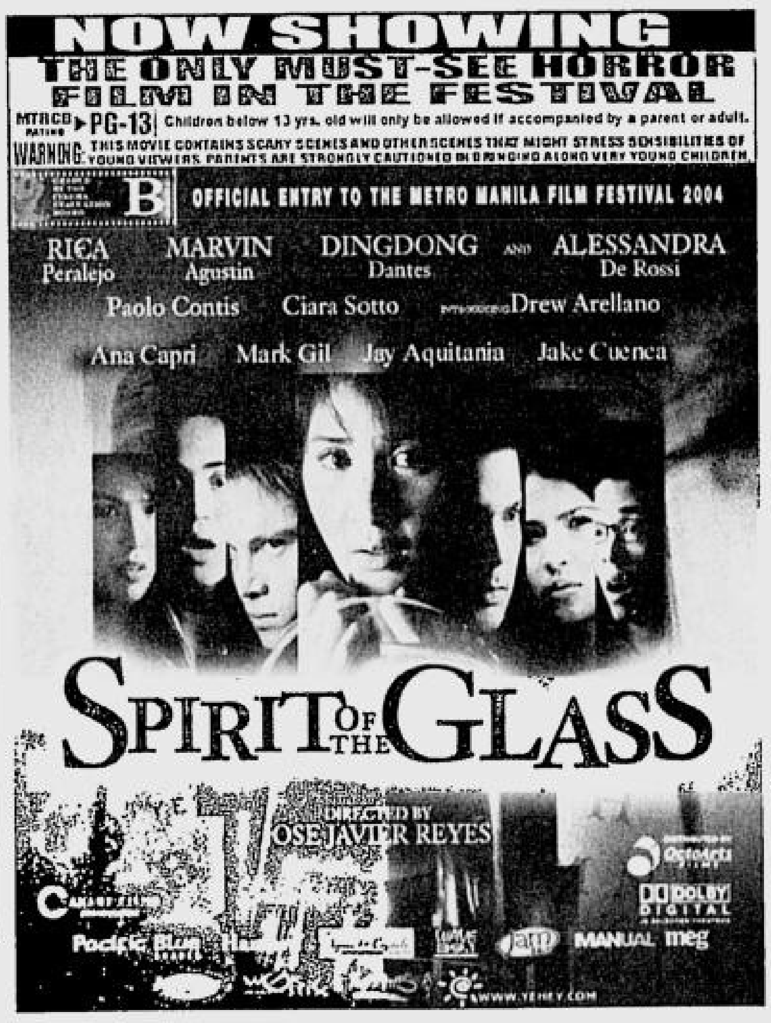
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A-RATING FOR 'PANAGHOY SA SUBA'

'Poetic, magical, sensitive storytelling'

JULIANA Palermo, like Montano, delivers a "fine performance."

"IN THESE times of slick melodramas and high-tech thrillers, 'Panaghoy sa Suba' takes a path less traveled and brings its audience to a world that is both strange and familiar, troubling yet serene. Bohol's lovely and mysterious land and waters provide an appropriate setting for this unusually quiet war movie. And the lyrical Binisaya is a welcome and refreshing change in a film industry that, for decades, has been dominated by Tagalog."

The Cinema Evaluation Board of the Film Development Council of the Philippines thus summed up its reasons for granting CM Films' entry to this year's Metro Manila Film Festival the coveted "A" rating.

Drawn from the board members' individual comments, the summation noted that the movie "is as refreshing as the river that is its

POETIC/ A2-4

Aleck Bovick sues ex-manager for estafa, forcing her into 'orgy' /A2-4

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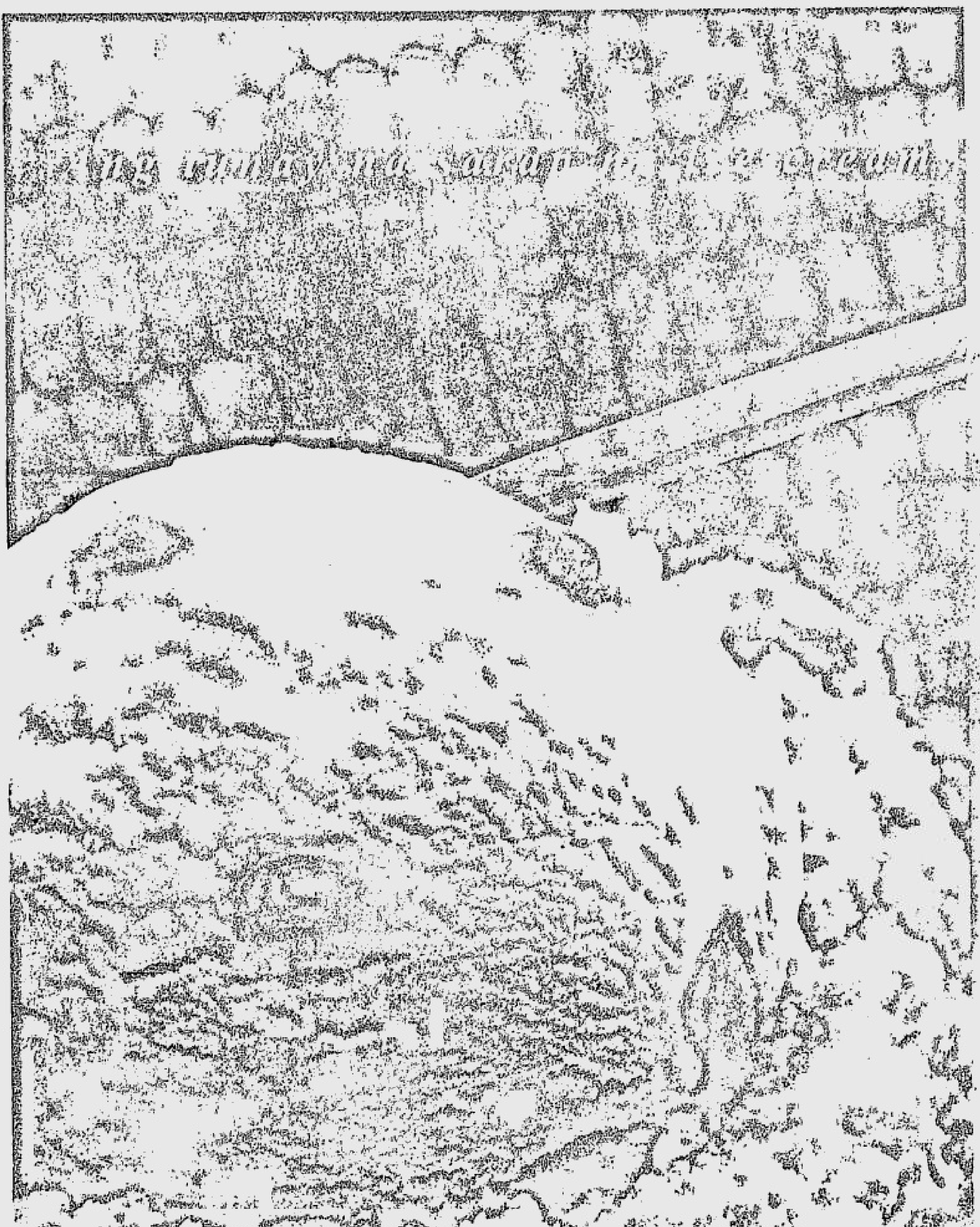

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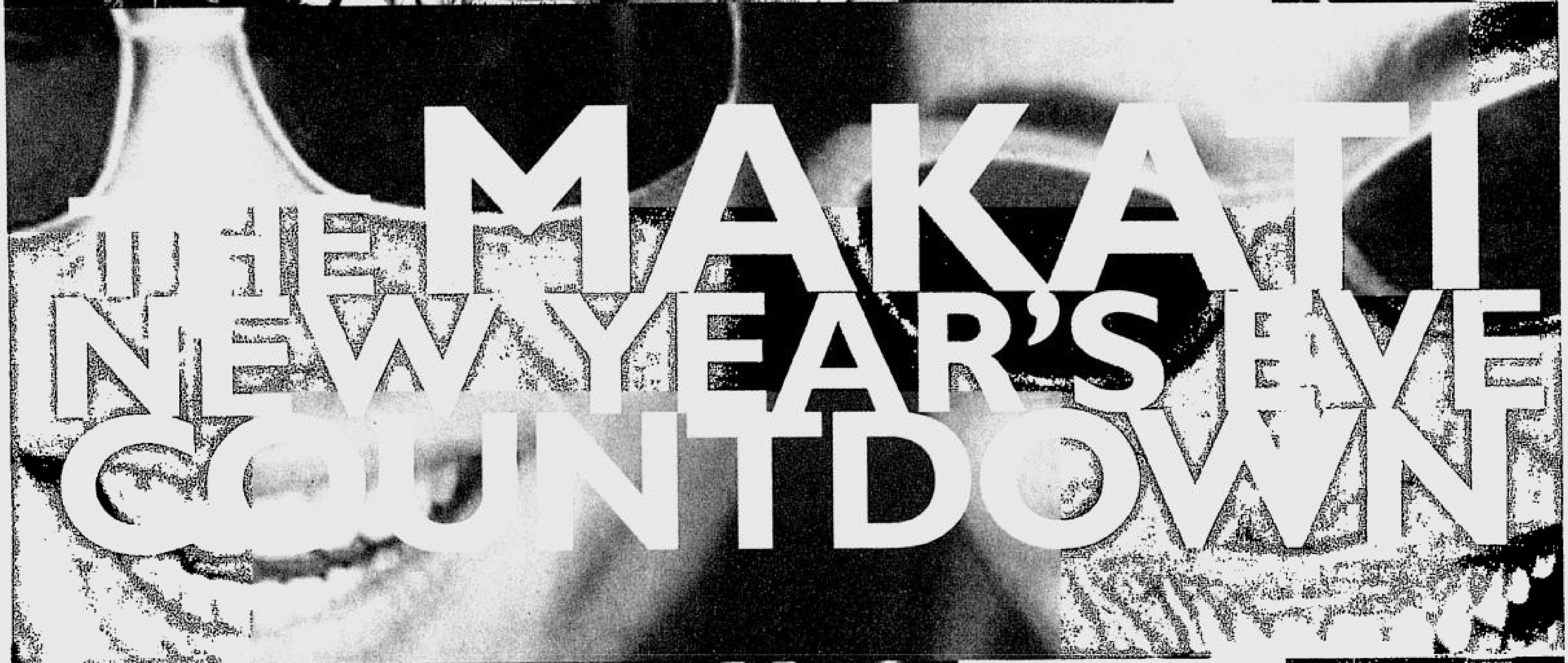

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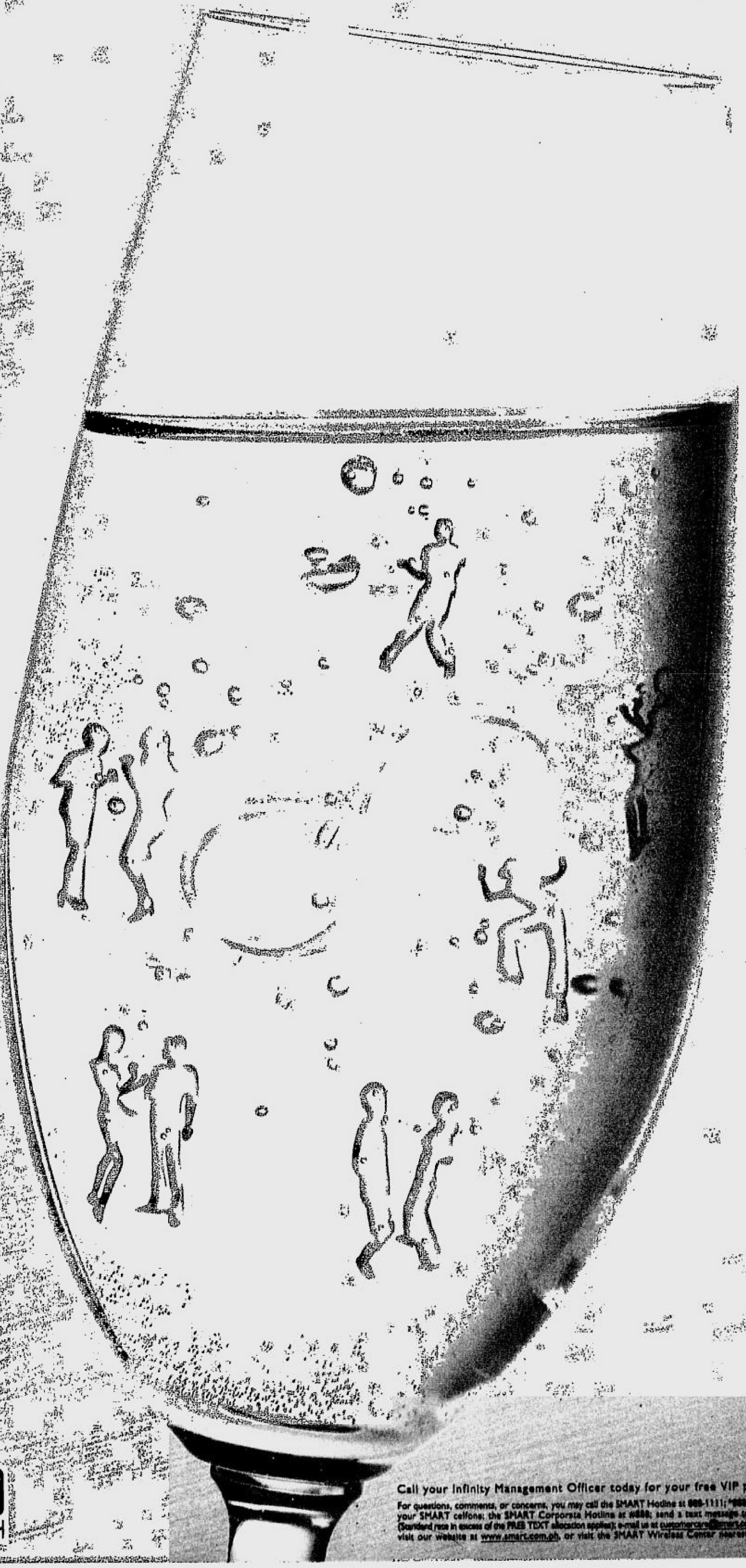

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Aleck Bovick sues ex-manager for estafa, forcing her into 'orgy'

By Philip C. Tubeza

BOVICK. "He took advantage of my trust."

SEXY star Aleck Bovick on Tuesday filed charges of estafa and abuse before the Department of Justice against her former talent manager and boyfriend, whom she also accused of forcing her to join an orgy with him.

In a five-page complaint affidavit, Bovick—Maria Theresa Bovick Tambis in real life—said her former manager and boyfriend, Glenn de la Cruz, alias Coco Simmo, withdrew her money from her bank accounts without her permission.

She charged De la Cruz with violating the Anti-Violence Against Women and Their Children Act for the abuse she allegedly suffered in his hands.

"He took advantage of the trust I had in him as my manager and former boyfriend," she said.

Bovick said she was left with only a total of P109,522.84 in her account at China Bank and a Security Bank "shadow account" that she did not know of.

She said this was a "small amount" since receipts from De la Cruz's talent agency, Eventhology Inc., showed that her account had received P543,055.40 of her salary at ABS-CBN.

She said that when she checked her Security Bank account, she found her remaining balance was only P55,522.84. Bovick said her manager had made her sign blank papers.

She said De la Cruz did not give her the fees she earned from a 15-bar tour for the Padi's Point chain. She said he informed her she would be getting P100,000, but she later learned that Padi's paid P30,000 for each show.

"As of now, I have not received anything from what I was supposed to earn from Padi's," said Bovick.

She said De la Cruz had yet to pay her for the Tide commercial she did on Oct. 12, 2004 and that he also took her Toyota Revo (XJF 951).

She said he abused her physically and psychologically.

"[B]ecause of my fear that [De la Cruz] would leave me... I was forced to have a threesome with (him) and Monica Midler," she said.

Bovick said De la Cruz also tried to force her to have orgies with starlet Katherine Luna and Margarita, one of the GI Babies, but these sexy stars refused.

'She said De la Cruz also beat her up to force her to stop crying when they fought.

"Besides his womanizing," said Bovick, "he also often said that I was stupid, that I knew nothing except acting, that I would not be able to go into business because I had no education, and that I was only a GRO and my mother was a showgirl."

'Poetic, magical, sensitive...

From page A2-1

main symbol."

"Panaghoy sa Suba" literally means "Cry of the River," and the river that is the movie's centerpiece is Loboc, which traverses the southern province.

Meticulous direction

The CEB described Cesar Montano's direction as "meticulous but light-handed." It turned "a somewhat rambling and slow screenplay into a poetic, sometimes even magical, current of silent struggle and survival," the board explained. "The sensitive and unhurried storytelling allows even the most quiet details to become eloquent metaphors—for instance, the village idiot, clinging like a tarsier to trees, sees the peace and comfort of the dead that no one else sees."

Contributing much to the film's lyricism, the board added, "is the generally crisp and vivid cinematography and the smooth and precise editing."

It also called attention to the music, "especially the songs rendered by the [world-famous] Loboc Children's Choir, even if the scoring becomes a bit too eager in some scenes."

The production design, "although not entirely flawless, is very effective," the CEB contended. "The costumes and the make-up, for instance, make the actors look like very real people. And the actors certainly act like very real people."

Fine actors

Individual performances definitely helped clinch that "A" rating as well.

The board said: "Montano and Jacky Woo rely mostly on subtle expressions and quiet gestures, making their characters more complex and poignant. Juliana Palermo also delivers a fine performance as the naive but sensuous Iset. Ronnie Lazaro's intelligent grasp of his character, a village idiot, and Daria Ramirez makes a relatively minor role quite memorable.

"But it is perhaps Rebecca Lusterio, as the innocent and brave Bikay, who leaves the most inedible mark. Her performance—like the call of the river, like the film itself—is silent and powerful, full of conviction and charm."

The CEB concluded its assessment with a call for "other filmmakers [to] also take this less traveled path."

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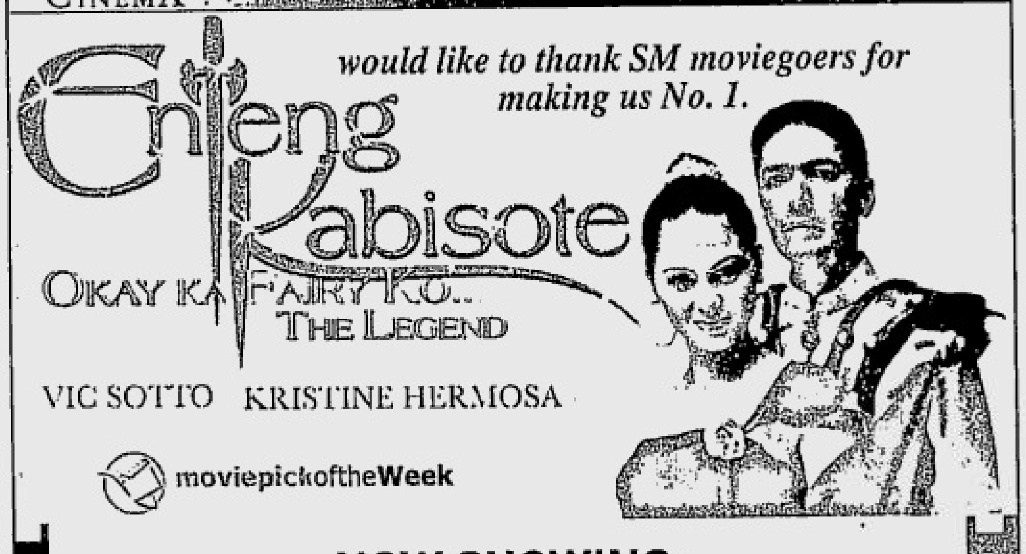

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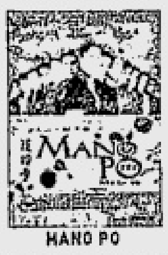

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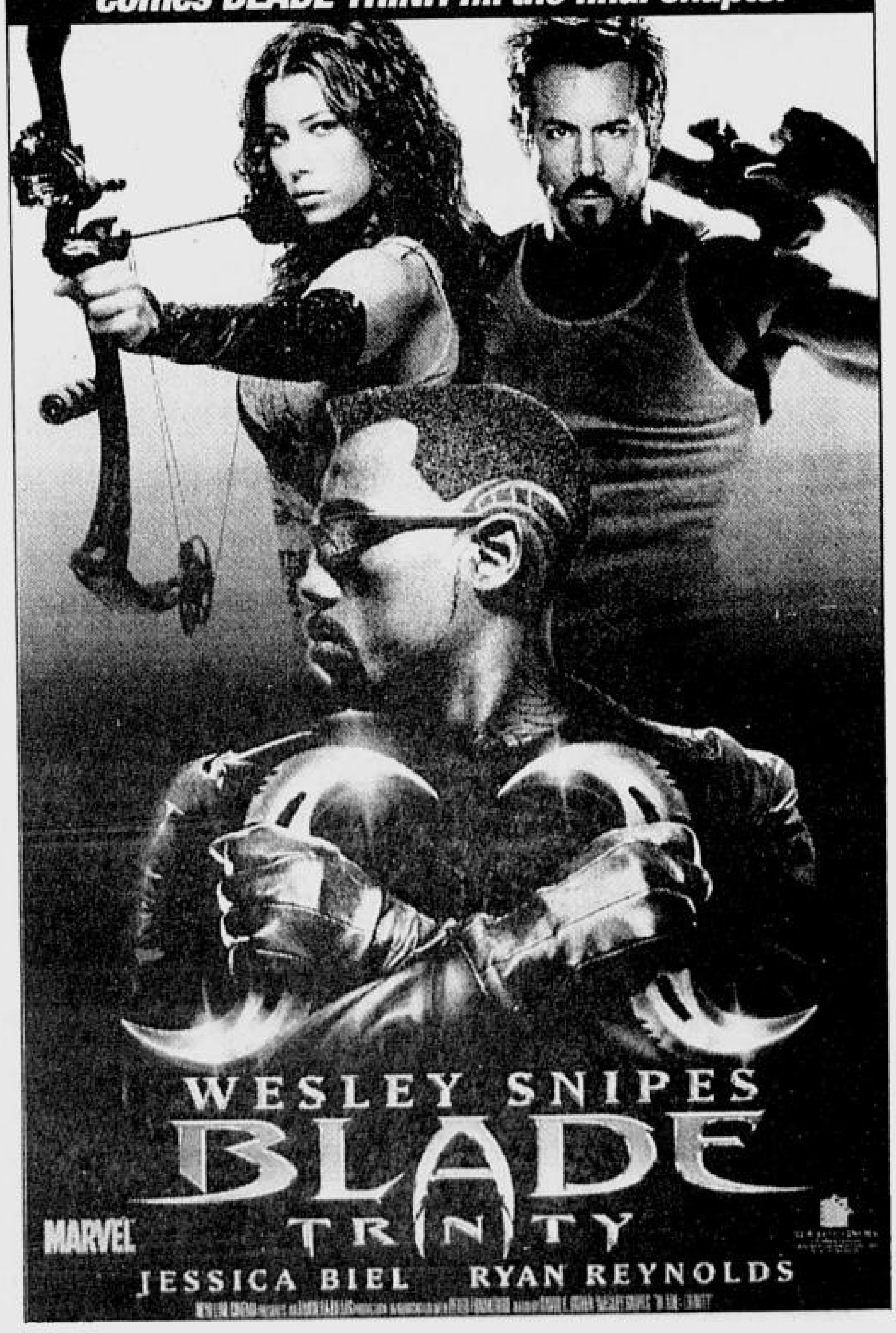

Classic tale of pig-spider friendship to be filmed in Australia for 2006

MELBOURNE—A film of the classic children's book "Charlotte's Web" will be shot in Australia next year, officials said Wednesday.

Steve Bracks, premier of Victoria state, said the Paramount Pictures' adaptation will be a mixture of animation and live action that will be filmed in the Melbourne suburb of Williamstown and Greendale.

Production is to begin late next month and the film is slated for release in 2006. "The major international production… is going to be the definitive remake," said Bracks.

Victoria, which has been trying to rival neighboring New South Wales state as a prime film location, also had major competition for "Charlotte's Web" from the United States, Canada and New Zealand.

"I am very pleased this has been secured for Victoria and I think it's going to be great for the film and TV industry," Bracks said.

It was the second recent coup for the local film industry after Victoria won in the bid for another blockbuster movie, the Marvel classic "Ghost Rider."

"Charlotte's Web," written by American author E.B. White and set in the 1940s, tells the story of a friendship between a pig, Wilbur, and a spider, Charlotte.

The cast for the film has not been announced but there are reports Hollywood child star Dakota Fanning, who also played in "The Cat in the Hat" and "I Am Sam," will play the part of Fern, a boy who teams up with Charlotte to save Wilbur from becoming pork chops.

The original, fully animated film was released in 1973. Gary Winick ("13 Going on 30") will direct the new version.

AFP

Cost-cutting reduces dwarves to 4

BERLIN—Snow White had to make do with just four dwarves rather than the usual seven due to cost-cutting at a theater in the eastern German town of Stendal, the Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper reported.

The Altmark Stendal theater said it could afford only six actors for its Christmas rendition of "Snow White and the Seven Dwarves," which led to protests from theater-goers from the nearby western city of Hanover who wanted to see seven dwarves.

The theater said it had attached two puppets in dwarf outfits to a background wall to give the production six dwarves.

The actor playing the prince was supposed to double as the seventh dwarf but only made one brief appearance on stage.

"The seventh dwarf wasn't on stage the whole time because he was stuck down in the mine working overtime," theater spokesperson Susanne Kreuzer told the newspaper.

Reuters

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2 LASTIKMAN
3 (DTS) MANO PO - 3
4 (DOLBY) ENTENG KABISOTE

Fiesta World Mall
(Lipa) tel (043) 981.0790
1 MANO PO - 3
2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
4 LASTIKMAN

Cinema 2000 Metrotown
(Tarlac) tel (045) 982.1729
1 LASTIKMAN
2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 (DOLBY) SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
4 (DTS) MANO PO - 3

Jade Cinema
(Angeles City) tel (045) 887.5001 to 03
1 (DOLBY EX) ENTENG KABISOTE
2 SIGAW
3 (DTS EX) MANO PO
4 LASTIKMAN

Cine Nepo
(Angeles City) tel (045) 887.0121
1 MONO PO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 (DOLBY) LASTIKMAN
4 (DTS) HAPPY TOGETHER

Cine Nepo
(Dagupan City) tel (075) 515.8489
1 MONO PO
2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 (DOLBY) LASTIKMAN
4 (DTS) HAPPY TOGETHER

Centre Plaza Cinema
(Balanga, Bataan) tel (047) 237.7007
1 SKY CAPTAIN
2 SHARK TALE

Cinema 2000 Waltermart
(Plaridel) tel (044) 7953320
1 ENTENG KABISOTE
2 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
3 (DOLBY) MANO PO - 3

MOVIES / SCHEDULES / PRICES SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

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MOVIEWORLD

CINEMA ACCESS
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FOR ALL BRANCHES

www.robinsonsmovieworld.com

MOVIES/SCHEDULES/PRICES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

• REGIONAL CINEMAS •

STA. ROSA (049) 837-0907
1 ENTENG KABISOTE
2 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
3 LASTIKMAN
4 SIGAW
5 MANO PO 3

LIPA (043) 757-3684 (043) 312-5870
1 MANO PO 3
2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 SIGAW
4 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
5 LASTIKMAN

DASMARIÑAS (046) 852-2125 (046) 416-4332
1 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER
2 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
3 SIGAW
4 AISHITE IMASU
5 LASTIKMAN

ANGELES (045) 892-2348
1 SIGAW
2 LASTIKMAN
3 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER
4 MANO PO 3

IMUS (046) 875-3838 (046) 471-8188
1 MANO PO 3
2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
4 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
5 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER
6 LASTIKMAN

STARMILLS (045) 875-1927 (045) 961-5270
1 SIGAW
2 AISHITE IMASU
3 LASTIKMAN
4 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER
5 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
6 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS

BACOLOD (034) 441-0453 (034) 441-0459
1 MANO PO 3
2 LASTIKMAN
3 ENTENG KABISOTE
4 SIGAW
5 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
6 PANAGHOY SA SUBA

ILOILO (033) 336-8070
1 MANO PO 3
2 LASTIKMAN
3 ENTENG KABISOTE
4 SIGAW
5 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
6 PANAGHOY SA SUBA

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AYALA CINEMAS THX

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ATC ALABANG TOWN CENTER	G1 GLORIETTA 1	G4 GLORIETTA 4	GB1 GREENBELT 1	GB3 GREENBELT 3	ACC AYALA CENTER CEBU
THX 1 MANO PO 3	1 MANO PO 3	1 LASTIKMAN	1 MANO PO 3	GUARANTEED SEATS THX 1 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	1 HAPPY TOGETHER
2 ENTENG KABISOTE	2 ENTENG KABISOTE	2 SIGAW	2 HAPPY TOGETHER	GUARANTEED SEATS THX 2 MANO PO 3	2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	GUARANTEED SEATS THX 3 ENTENG KABISOTE		GUARANTEED SEATS 3 ENTENG KABISOTE	3 SIGAW
4 HAPPY TOGETHER	4 HAPPY TOGETHER	4 PANAGHOY SA SUBA		GUARANTEED SEATS 4 HAPPY TOGETHER	4 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
5 AISHITE IMASU		5 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS		GUARANTEED SEATS 5 SIGAW	5 MANO PO 3
		6 HAPPY TOGETHER			
		7 AISHITE IMASU			

At the Activity Center

GLORIETTA	ALABANG TOWN CENTER	AYALA CENTER CEBU
CHRISTMAS RUSH BAZAAR 2004 December 24 to 26, 2004	BLIMS/AUTOMATIC CENTER December 13 to 28, 2004	TV ESKWELA SHOW December 29, 2004

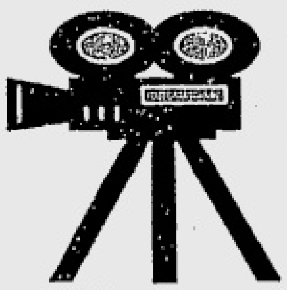
ENTERTAINMENT LIVE!

GREENBELT 2	GREENBELT 3
GREENBELT 2: MUSIC STYLES EVERY THURSDAYS TO SUNDAYS (7-10pm PIDO (Thu) ACOUSTIC JIVE (Fri) FIRST CIRCLE (Sat)	FIREWORKS DISPLAY EVERY FRIDAY, SATURDAY & SUNDAYS until December 26, 9:00pm, Greenbelt 3 Park

Onstage!
REPERTORY PHILIPPINES presents OH ROMEO
at REP's GLOBE THEATER - January 14 to 30, 2005

Ayala MUSEUM
Visit the New Ayala Museum located beside Greenbelt 4 along Makati Avenue.
For inquiries, please call 757-7117

Watch the 2004 MetroManila Film Festival entries in Ayala Cinemas and get special offers from our partners!



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FREE drink upsize for every purchase of a value meal.

Jollibee
FREE drink upsize for every purchase of a value meal.

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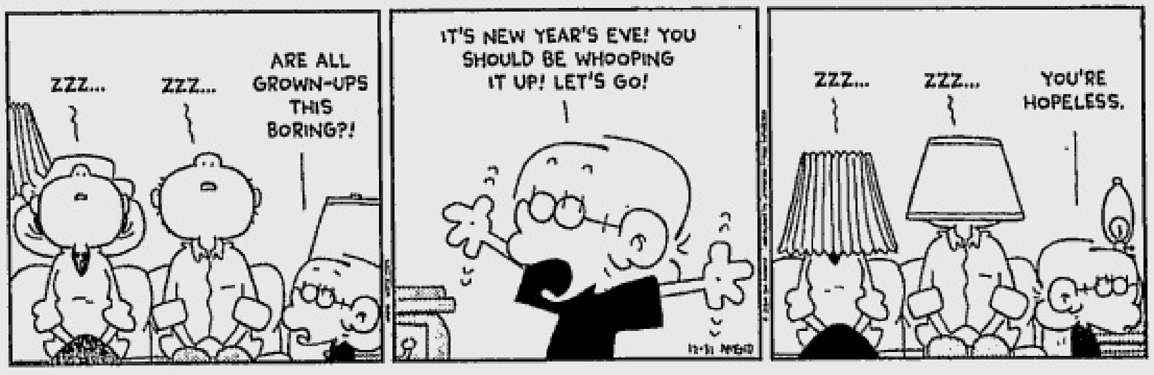
AYALA CENTER
ALABANG TOWN CENTER
AYALA CENTER CEBU
LoveMall!

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
ComicRelief
e-mail feedback at arts@inquirer.com.ph
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 31, 2004

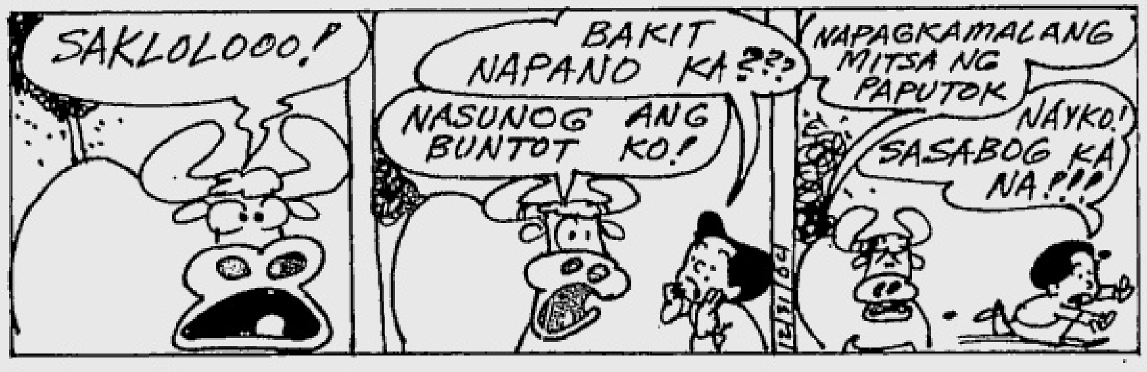
FOXTROT

BY BILL AMEND


ZZZ...
ZZZ...
ARE ALL GROWN-UPS THIS BORING?!
IT'S NEW YEAR'S EVE! YOU SHOULD BE WHOOPING IT UP! LET'S GO!
ZZZ...
ZZZ...
YOU'RE HOPELESS.
12-31 AMEND

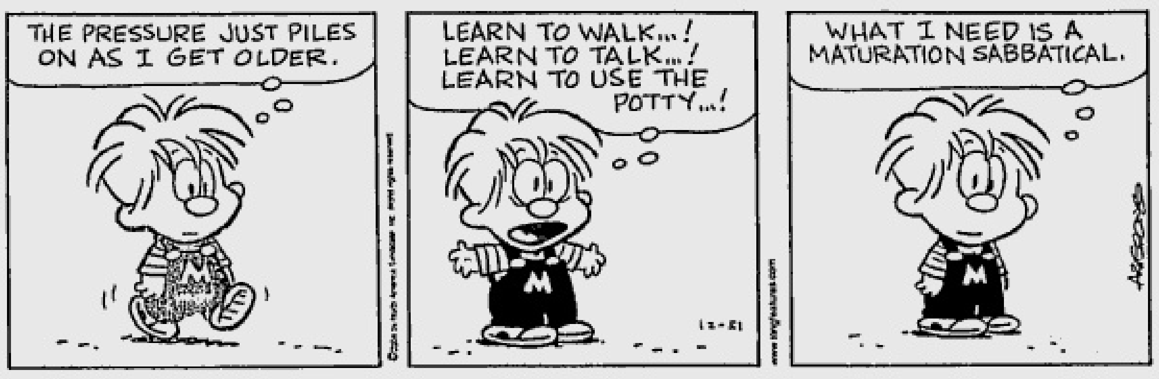
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


SAKLOLOOO!
BAKIT NAPANO KA???
NASUNOG ANG BUNTOT KO!
NAPAGKAMALANG MITSA NG PAPUTOK
NAYKO! SASABOG KA NA?!!
12/31/04

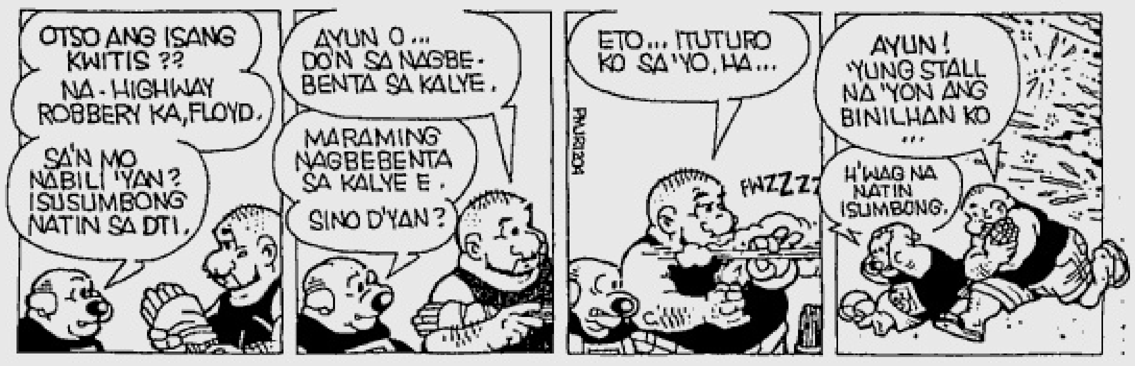
MARVIN

BY TOM ARMSTRONG


THE PRESSURE JUST PILES ON AS I GET OLDER.
LEARN TO WALK...! LEARN TO TALK...! LEARN TO USE THE POTTY...!
WHAT I NEED IS A MATURATION SABBATICAL.
12-31
ARMSTRONG

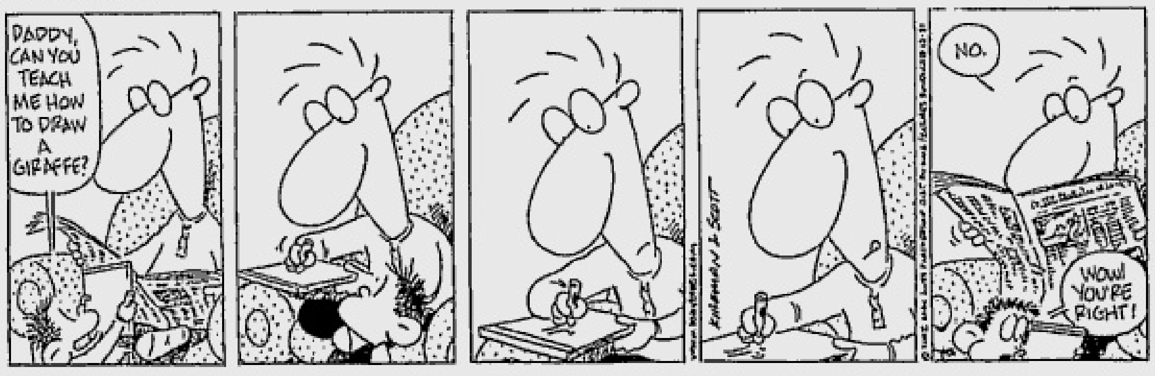
PUGAD BABOY

BY P.M. JUNIOR


OTSO ANG ISANG KWITIS ?? NA-HIGHWAY ROBBERY KA, FLOYD.
SA'N MO NABILI 'YAN? ISUSUMBONG NATIN SA DTI.
AYUN O... DO'N SA NAGBEBENTA SA KALYE.
MARAMING NAGBEBENTA SA KALYE E.
SINO D'YAN?
ETO... ITUTURO KO SA'YO, HA...
FWZZZ
AYUN! 'YUNG STALL NA 'YON ANG BINILHAN KO...
H'WAG NA NATIN ISUMBONG.

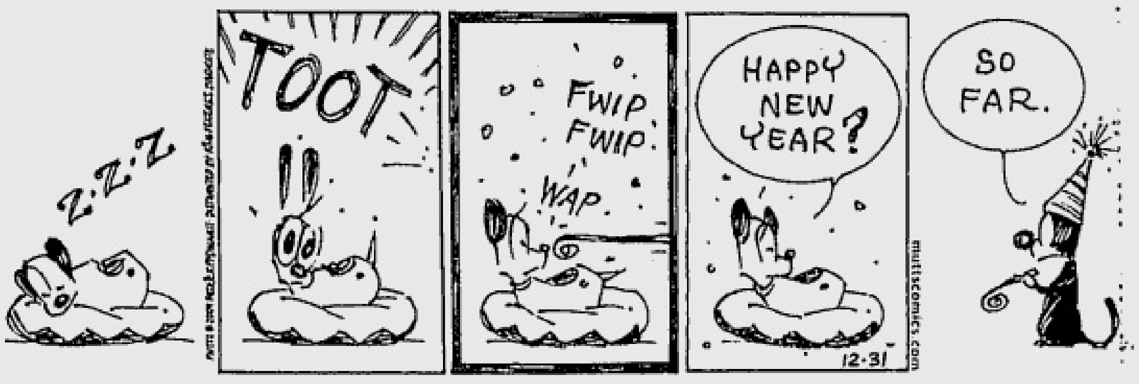
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


DADDY, CAN YOU TEACH ME HOW TO DRAW A GIRAFFE?
NO.
WOW! YOU'RE RIGHT!
KIRKMAN & SCOTT

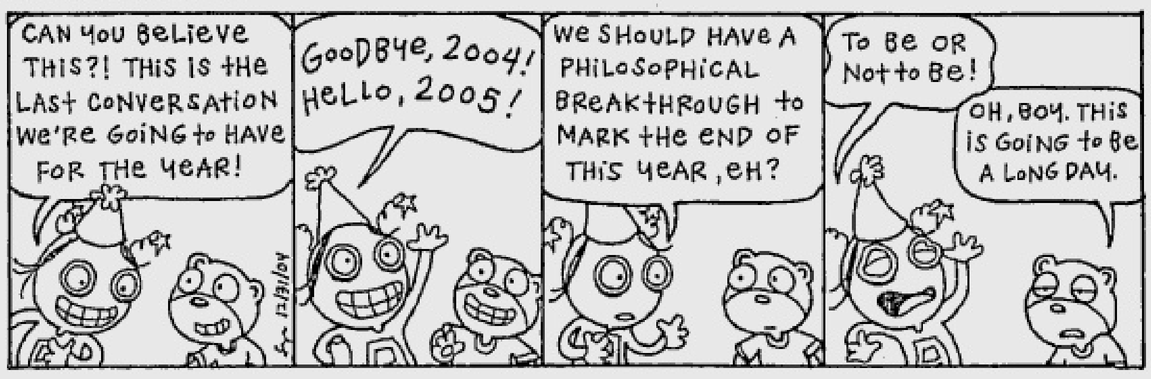
MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


Z.Z.Z
TOOT
FWIP FWIP
WAP
HAPPY NEW YEAR?
SO FAR.
12-31
muttscomics.com

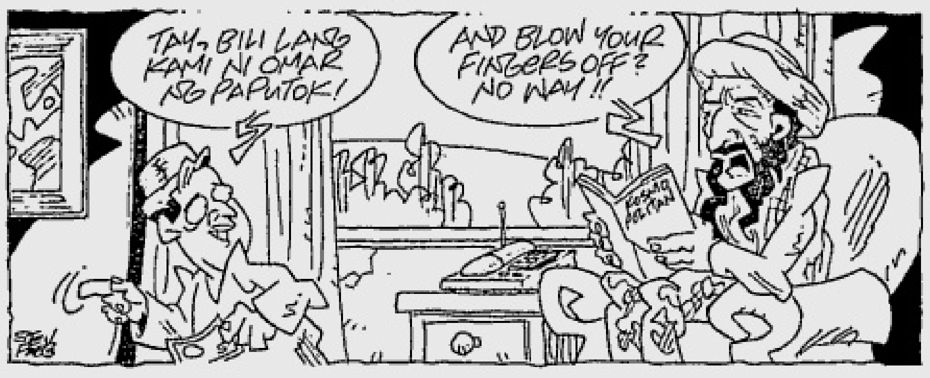
ATOMO AND WEBOY

BY LYRA GARCELLANO


CAN YOU BELIEVE THIS?! THIS IS THE LAST CONVERSATION WE'RE GOING TO HAVE FOR THE YEAR!
12/31/04
GOODBYE, 2004! HELLO, 2005!
WE SHOULD HAVE A PHILOSOPHICAL BREAKTHROUGH TO MARK THE END OF THIS YEAR, EH?
TO BE OR NOT TO BE!
OH, BOY. THIS IS GOING TO BE A LONG DAY.

DIVINE COMEDY

BY STEVEN PABALINAS


TAY, BILI LANG KAMI NI OMAR NG PAPUTOK!
AND BLOW YOUR FINGERS OFF? NO WAY!!
STEV PABS

KAHIT MGA
ANAK NI
BIN LADEN
GUSTO
RING MAG-
CELEBRATE
NG NEW
YEAR

HOROSCOPE

BY FRANCIS DRAKE

YOU BORN TODAY: You love beauty in its many forms. You appreciate tasteful surroundings and elegant details. You enjoy literature, music and the arts. Naturally, you are generally well-groomed and gracious. The ideals you value the most are harmony, stability and beauty. Expect major changes this year as significant as those in 1996.

Birthdate of: Ben Kingsley, actor; Anthony Hopkins, actor; Elizabeth Arden, cosmetics entrepreneur.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): Don't make hasty judgments about shared property or anything held jointly with someone. You have a strong impulse to shoot from the hip (not a good idea).

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): Quarrels and differences of opinions with others can spoil the serenity of this day. It's not worth it. Your peace of mind is far more valuable than scoring a point with someone.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): Accidents in the workplace are possible . Expect systems to crash and glitches to occur with electronic equipment. Co-workers might be touchy as well!

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): Be patient with children. They are easily upset today (as are you!). Guard against accidents. Be vigilant when watching children. Unpredictable events can occur.

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): Domestic disagreements are likely today. Don't get your belly in a rash about something. Appliances and technological equipment might break down today.

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): Today is an accident-prone day. Be careful when driving or walking. You might also want to be careful when speaking. Frogs and toads will pop out of your mouth if you're not careful.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): Keep an eye on your finances today. Things are unpredictable. You might win money; you might lose money. Anything could happen. Watch impulsive spending as well!

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): You will need extra patience today when dealing with others. It's very easy to suddenly fly off the handle. But anger serves no purpose except to make everyone miserable—including you! Remember this.

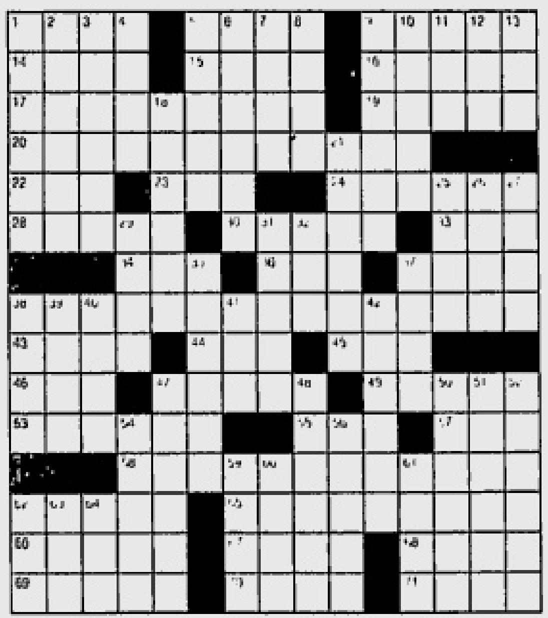
SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): You feel restless and at loose ends today. Your efforts to deal with the government or large institutions are frustrating. Your expectations are not met. (Just grin and bear it.)

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): Don't be surprised if a friend seems to attack you today. Perhaps this person thinks you have offended him or her. Either way, tiny arguments can erupt quickly. (Keep your words soft and sweet in case you have to eat them later.)

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): This is a poor day to talk to the boss. People are grouchy and unpredictable. You don't know in which direction to jump.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): You don't want anyone telling you what to do today. You feel independent and very much your own person. You want to call your own shots.

DAILY CROSSWORD



By Allan E. Parrish
Mentor, OH
12/31/04

ACROSS
1 Send to the canvas
5 Atlas contents
9 Windows predecessor
14 Japanese golfer Aoki
15 Empowered
16 Video-game pioneer company
17 Safe
19 Young sheep
20 Annual greeting
22 JFK data
23 Put down
24 Periwinkle
28 Battery brand
30 Signs of healing
33 Paraffin
34 Also
36 Latin lesson word
37 Actress Virna
38 Annual tradition
43 Exhale audibly
44 Dogpatch Daisy
45 __ Kippur
46 Brace amount
47 Fancy cravat
49 Drop in one's two cents
53 Top flier
55 "__ River"
57 Morse unit
58 Annual song
62 Captivate
65 "Oklahoma!" character
66 Black tea
67 Moral weakness
68 "The Good Earth" role
69 Singer Rimes
70 Belgian river
71 Salinger character

DOWN
1 Gossiped
2 What we will?
3 __ tunnel syndrome
4 C. Everett _
5 __ Carta
6 Monasteries
7 John Deere product
8 Erotic
9 Kuala Lumpur populace
10 Quarterback Bart
11 TVA creation
12 Poetic eyeball
13 Bro's sibling
18 Some stockings
21 Incarnate
25 Small branch
26 Strike by Zorro
27 Way out
29 Liquid asset
31 Bit part
32 Porthos, to Athos
35 Maiden
37 Flaccid
38 "The Thin Man" pooch
39 Fuzzy fruit
40 Stravinsky or Sikorsky
41 Del. mil. grp.
42 Persistent complainer
47 Perspicacity
48 Hypnotic state
50 Pastoral poems
51 Start of the workday, often
52 Ageless in poems
54 Composer Copland
56 Keyboard key
59 Frontiersman Crockett
60 Pitcher Tiant
61 __ gin fizz
62 U.S. Army rank
63 "__ Haw"
64 Rap-sheet letters

Thursday's Puzzle Solved

I	N	U	R	E	■	L	I	S	A	■	U	R	N	S
B	O	S	O	N	■	A	D	I	N	■	N	E	A	P
I	T	S	B	E	T	T	E	R	T	O	H	A	V	E
S	E	R	B	■	A	T	E	■	E	R	O	D	E	D
■	■	■	E	S	T	E	■	I	A	G	O	■	■	■
A	P	E	R	M	A	N	E	N	T	■	K	N	A	P
R	A	T	S	O	■	■	T	R	E	■	S	E	T	A
E	T	H	■	G	A	T	H	E	R	S	■	A	S	T
T	E	A	R	■	L	E	I	■	■	E	S	T	E	E
E	R	N	E	■	I	N	C	O	M	E	T	H	A	N
■	■	■	D	R	E	D	■	B	A	S	E	■	■	■
S	W	E	D	E	N	■	U	R	I	■	T	H	A	I
T	O	B	E	F	A	S	C	I	N	A	T	I	N	G
A	V	O	N	■	T	O	L	E	■	L	E	N	T	O
T	E	N	S	■	E	L	A	N	■	A	D	D	E	R

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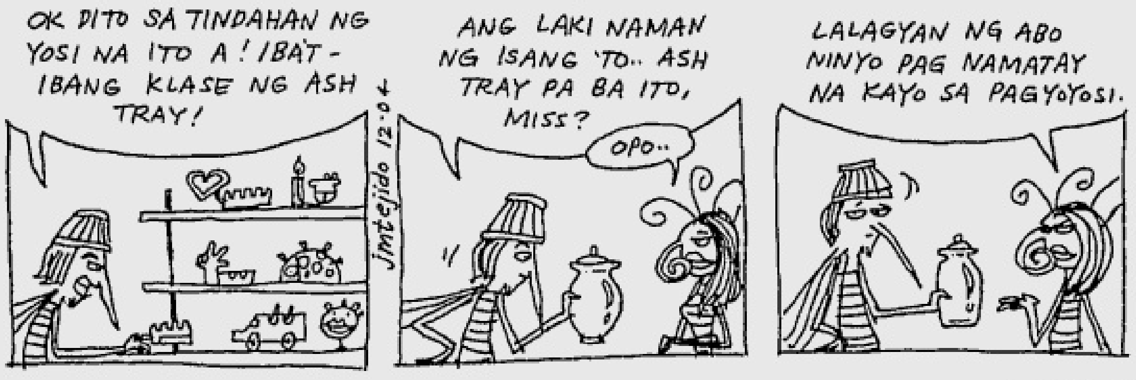
12/31/04

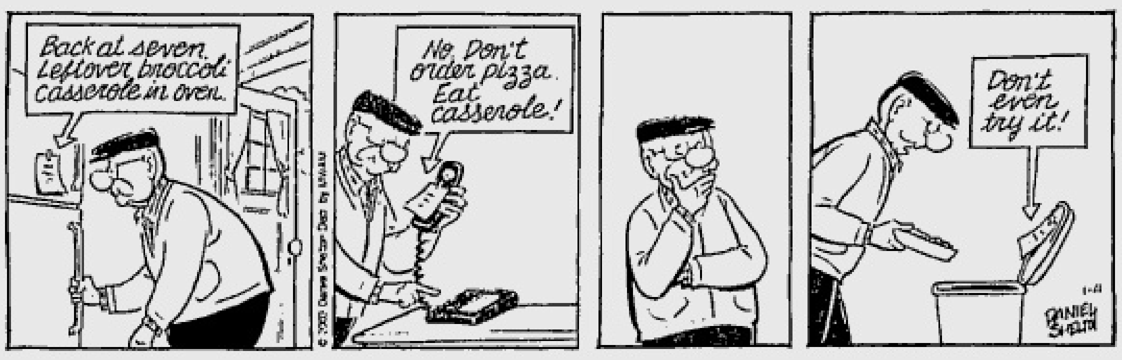
MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


OK DITO SA TINDAHAN NG YOSI NA ITO A! IBA'T-IBANG KLASE NG ASH TRAY!
jmtejido 12-04
ANG LAKI NAMAN NG ISANG 'TO.. ASH TRAY PA BA ITO, MISS?
OPO..
LALAGYAN NG ABO NINYO PAG NAMATAY NA KAYO SA PAGYOYOSI.

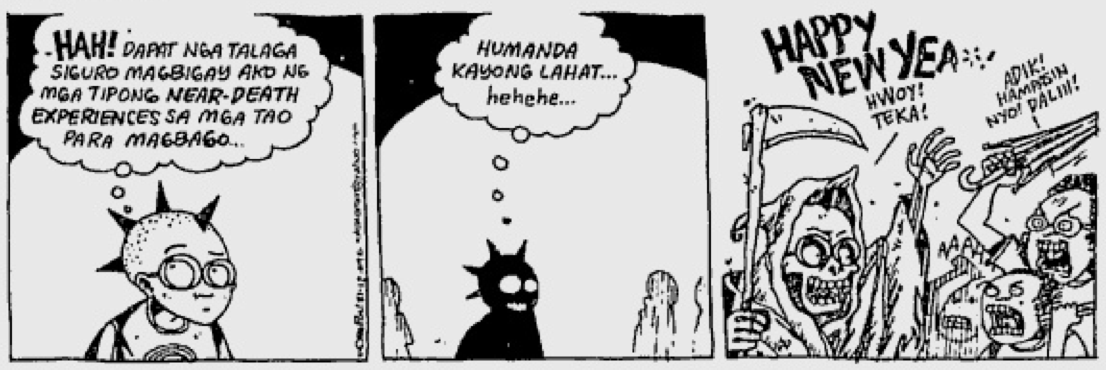
BEN

BY DANIEL SHELTON


Back at seven. Leftover broccoli casserole in oven.
No. Don't order pizza. Eat casserole!
Don't even try it!
DANIEL SHELTON

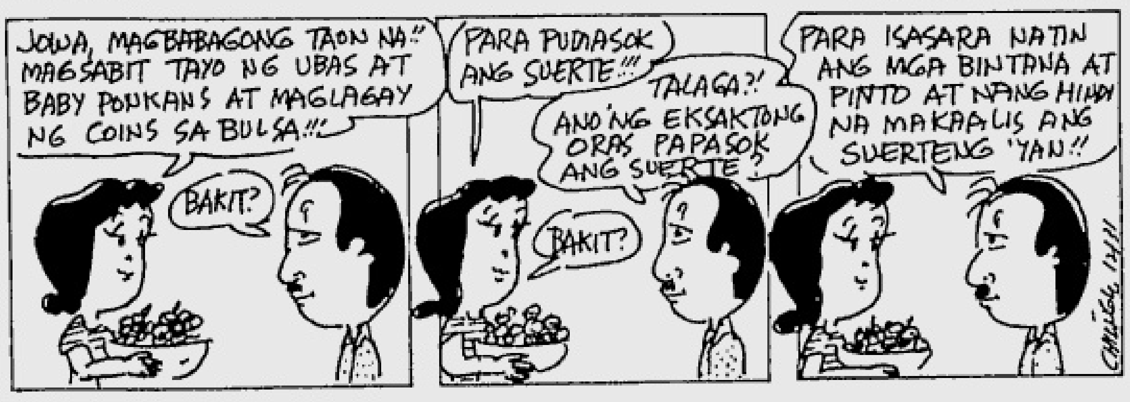
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


HAH! DAPAT NGA TALAGA SIGURO MAGBIGAY AKO NG MGA TIPONG NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES SA MGA TAO PARA MAGBAGO...
HUMANDA KAYONG LAHAT... hehehe...
HAPPY NEW YEA
HWOY! TEKA!
ADIK! HAMPASIN NYO! DALI!!
AAAH

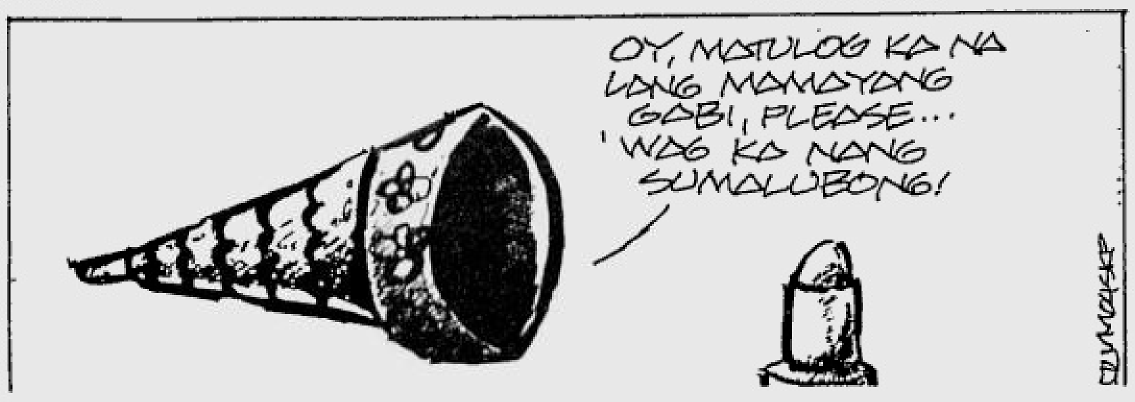
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


JOWA, MAGBABAGONG TAON NA!! MAGSABIT TAYO NG UBAS AT BABY PONKANS AT MAGLAGAY NG COINS SA BULSA!!!
BAKIT?
PARA PUMASOK ANG SUERTE!!!
TALAGA?!
ANO'NG EKSAKTONG ORAS PAPASOK ANG SUERTE?
BAKIT?
PARA ISASARA NATIN ANG MGA BINTANA AT PINTO AT NANG HINDI NA MAKAALIS ANG SUERTENG 'YAN!!
CHIONGLO

TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


OY, MATULOG KA NA LANG MAMAYANG GABI, PLEASE... 'WAG KA NANG SUMALUBONG!

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, EVERYONE'S LISTENING TO MANILA'S HOTTEST!

MONSTER RADIO RX93.1
RX93.1
monster store
MY WAY
AMBAGAN 04
"MANILA'S HOTTEST"

MONSTER RADIO RX 93.1 WISHES YOU A HAPPY CHRISTMAS AND A BLESSED NEW YEAR.
THANK YOU FOR MAKING 2004 A WINNING YEAR FOR US.

MONSTER RADIO RX93.1

4:00 pm FRIDAYS 10:00 pm
PBA
ABC iba tayo
Secrets with Juliana Palermo
ClickTheCity.com

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER TV GUIDE
Friday, December 31, 2004

Channel	2:30PM	3:00PM	3:30PM	4:00PM	4:30PM	5:00PM	5:30PM	6:00PM	6:30PM	7:00PM	7:30PM	8:00PM	8:30PM	9:00PM	9:30PM	10:00PM	10:30PM	11:00PM	11:30PM
ABS-CBN 2				Showbiz No. 1	Sandara's Romance	Get Backers	Ragnarok	Masked Rider Ryuki	TV Patrol	Spirits	Krystala	Lovers In Paris	Hiram	Star Circle National Teen Quest	Star Circle Nat'l Teen Quest Elimin Special			Insider	Private I
NBN	Value Vision	Value Vision		Value Vision	Teledyaryo	Value Vision		Gold & Glory In Gruzza	The Working President	Network Forum		Teledyaryo		Musconi Cup 2003				Ugnayang Pambansa	
ABC 5			Problema Nyo, Sagot Ko	PBA Game-Bol	PBA				Sentro	PBA					Big News	Secrets	TNA Impact		Billboard On-Air
GMA 7	Leya (2:45 PM)	Joyride (3:15 PM)	Snow Angel (3:45 PM)		One Piece	Witch Hunter Robin	Slam Dunk	24 Oras		Extra Challenge		Mulawin	Starstruck (8:45 PM)	Forever In My Heart (9:15 PM)		Bubble Gang			Saksi
RPN 9	Metro TV Shopping			Hey Arnold!	As Told By Ginger	Wild Thornberries	Sponge Bob	Entertainment Tonight	Just For Laughs	Enterprise		Monk		Dead Zone		Newswatch Now	Overseas Christmas Presentation		
IBC 13		Japan Video Topic		EZ Shop		IBC Express Balita		Home Shopping Network		Celebrity Dot Com		Global Family Series		D.E.N.R.		GMA The Working Preside	IBC News Tonite	GMA The Working President	
Solar		WWE Velocity		Thunder Box		Rostal	Ozzy & Drix	Mucha Lucha!	Avengers	Deep Space Nine		WWE Smackdown				WWE Velocity		Wow	
Nickelodeon	Dora, The Explorer	Little Bear	Blues Clues	SpongeBob SquarePants	All That	Are You Afraid of the Dark?	100 Deeds of Eddie McDowd	The Amanda Show	The Brother's Garcia	Fairly Odd Parents	SpongeBob SquarePants	As Told By Ginger	Are You Afraid of the Dark?	All That	100 Deeds of Eddie McDowd	The Amanda Show	Rocket Power	The Wild Thornberrys	The Brother's Garcia
MYX		Urban MYX	Rock MYX	Pop MYX	OPM MYX	Take 5	My MYX	MYX Daily Top Ten		Mellow MYX	Rock MYX	Pop MYX	Urban MYX	Star MYX	Club MYX	My MYX	MYX Backtrax	OPM MYX	Mellow MYX
ETC		What I Like About You	JKX	The Today Show		Starting Over		NBC Nightly News	Entertainment Tonight	Will & Grace	What I Like About You	Iron Chef		Star Search		Tonight Show With Jay Leno		Blind Date	Fifth Wheel
Cinema One		Bethlehem's Child				Kahit Kailan				Pinocchio			Review Night	Christmas Concert Special				Milan	
Studio 23		Urban MYX	Rock MYX		Pop MYX	Jimmy Neutron	Xiaolin Showdown	Teen Titans	Justice League	Wazzup Wazzup	Spider-Man: The Animated Series	Miss Match		Playing It Straight		News Central	The Oprah Winfrey Show		Spin City
AXN		The Fan					30 Seconds To Fame	Gensomaden Saiyuki	Gensomaden Saiyuki	7 Days		The Right Stuff II	Rated X	Cold Squad		A Knight's Tale			
Star World		The Bold & The Beautiful		Hollywood Squares	Home Improvement	Ally McBeal		The Simpsons	The Drew Carey Show	Star News Asia	Friends	TNA Wrestling/ The Three Tenors In The Forbidden City		Stupid Behavior Caught On Tape	When Hidden Cameras Attack	Ultimate Force		Friends	Stupid Behavior Caught On Tape
CNN				Business International		Larry King Live		World News	World Sport	Business International		World News Asia		World News	World Sport	World News Asia		World News	World Sport
National Geographic	On Assignment	NG Sea		Nat Geographic Amazing Moments		When Natural Disasters Strike Back		The Snake Wranglers	Croc Chronicles With Dr. Brady Barr	Wild		About Asia		National Geographic Specials		NG Sea		Weather Gone Mad	Seismic Seconds
Solar Sports		Boxing - Manny Pacquiao vs. 3k Battery			Sounds of the Finals					NBA Action		In This Corner		NBA San Antonio vs. Portland					GWS ep.53
Lifestyle Network	Country Style	Interiors By Design	Decorating With Style	Decorating Cents	Moto Mario	Sweet Dreams	30 Minute Meals	Bill Boggs Corner	Unwrapped	Ming's Quest	Revealed With Jules Asner		New York Nick	Guess Who's Coming To Decorate		Chicago			
HBO			Doc Hollywood			Enough (5:15PM)				The Rookie (7:05 PM)				The Matrix Reloaded				Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Secrets (11:15PM)	
Star Movies			Saving Jessica Lynch (3:45 PM)				That Thing You Do!			Bulletproof Monk (7:15 PM)				Die Another Day				Die Another Day (11:15PM)	
Cartoon Network	Scooby-Doo Show	The All New Popeye Show		Tom & Jerry Show	Baby Looney Tunes	TBA		Premiere	Toon Pick		Yu-Gi-Oh!	Zoids: Fuzors	The Looney Tunes Show	Mucha Lucha!	Codename: Kids Next Door	Justice League		Aqua Teen (11:15PM)	Yu-Gi-Oh!
ESPN	World Pool League '04 Warsaw, Poland		2004-05 Big 12 Conf. Basketball- Gonzaga vs Missou				Tour De Taiwan '04 (int'l)		Goals!	2004 Motor City Bowl - Connecticut vs Toledo							Sportscenter Taiwan	Eng. Premier League Preview	Sportscenter Taiwan
Disney Channel	Kim Possible	Totally Spies	Lizzie Mcguire	Even Stevens	That's So Raven	Martin Mystery	Totally Spies	The Legend Of Tarzan	Lilo & Stitch/Un-[illegible] Bunny	America's Funniest Home Video	Wonderful World Of Disney			My Wife And Kids	That's So Raven	According To Jim	America's Funniest Home Video	Wonderful World Of Disney	
Cinemax	Mother, May I Sleep With Danger?			Landslide (4:15 PM)			Free Willy 3 The Rescue			Blue Crush (7:15 PM)				Fire Down Below			Ghosts Of Mississippi		
Hallmark Channel	Mad About You	Back When We Were Grown Ups				Play With Me Sesame	Sesame Street		Bewitched	Mysterious Ways		Sue Thomas: F.B.Eye		Virtual Mom			The District (10:35PM)		Mysterious Ways (11:25PM)
Discovery Channel		Power Zone				Wild Discovery		Ultimate Discovery		Junkyard Wars		Mythbusters		Wild Discovery		Best Of Discovery			
MTV Philippines		Whatever Things	05 MAA Local Voting Party	Non-Stop Hits		Non-Stop Hits	05 MAA Nominee Specials	MTV Get Spotted	MTV Loveline	Non-Stop Hits	Non-Stop Hits	MTV Brand New	Be Seen @ MTV	MTV Presents		Newlyweds		VH1 Hits! Video Collection	
Sports Plus			Got A Grip	Porsche md 3&4	Golf Academy 2002	This Is The PGA Tour		Golf Globe 2002	Pac 10 College Football Stanford at Cal					Inside the PGA	NFL Gameday	WTA Scot Open SFinal1			
EWTN	Does The Church Still Teach That	Angelus (3:15 PM)	Stations Of The Cross	Image Of God	Faith Factory	The Holy Rosary With Mother Angelica and the Nuns Of Our Lady Of Angels Monastery	Search And Rescue	Your Call	EWTN Gallery	Life on The Rock Encore		Gospel Of Life In Health Care	Defending Life	Daily Mass		Angelus (10:15PM)	Backstage	Father Corapi And The Catechism Of The Catholic Church	

TV SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

Ang inyong tagapaghatid ng ulat-pangmulat
alas-10 ng gabi na! Tuwing Huwebes
Ating kabalitaan
Cheri Mercado
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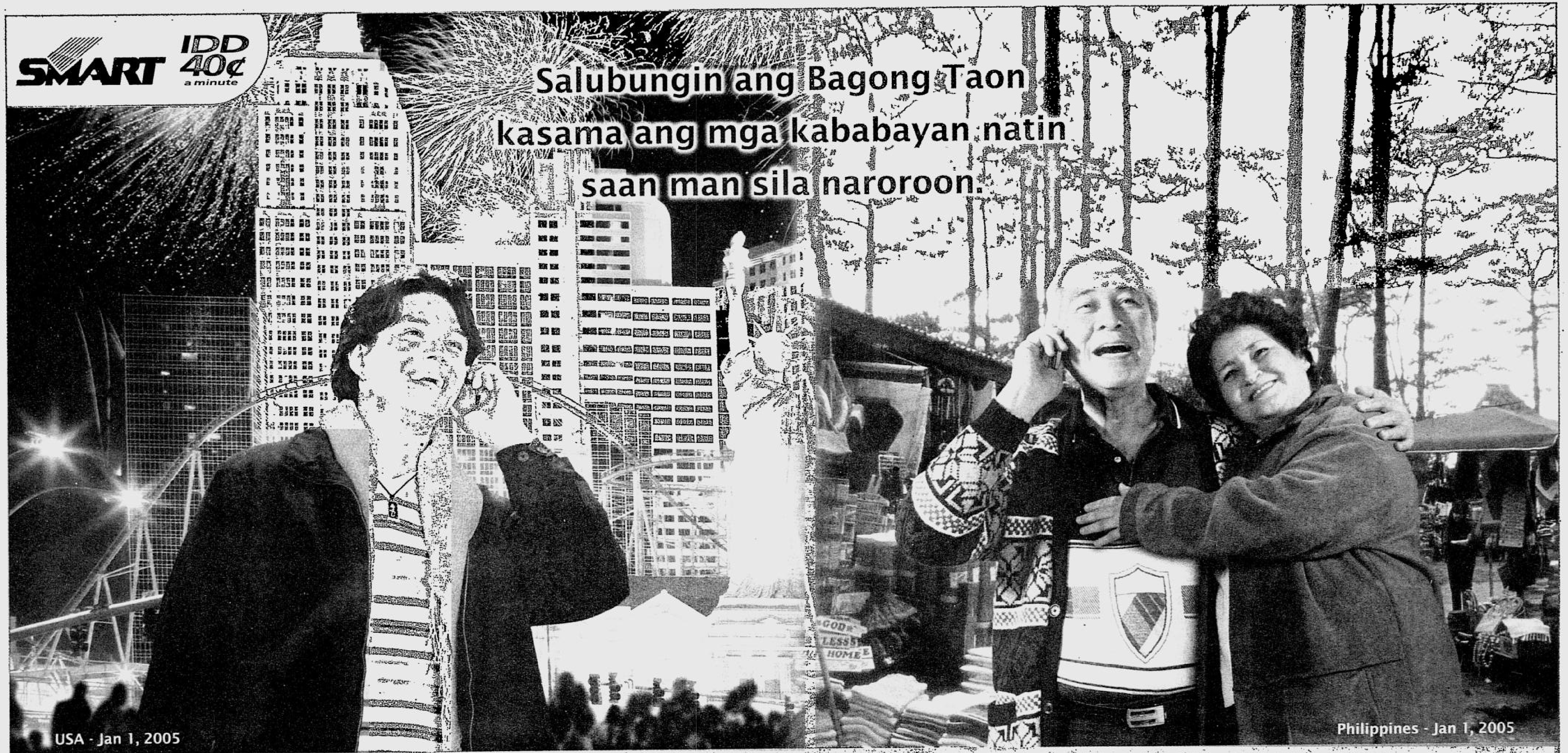
INQ TV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SMC offers $1.37B for Aussie dairy firm

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

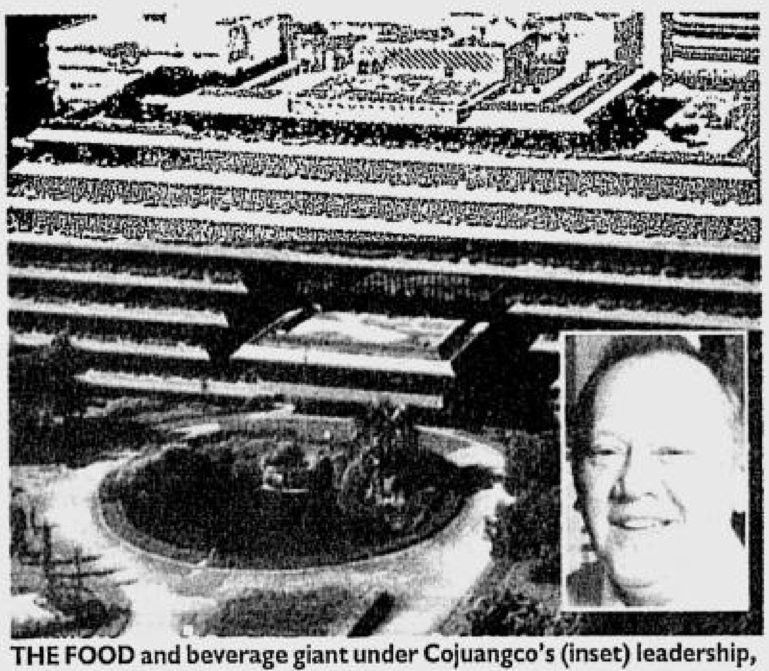
SAN MIGUEL Corp., Southeast Asia's largest food and beverage company, yesterday announced its A$178-billion ($1.37 billion) bid to acquire National Foods Ltd., Australia's largest publicly listed dairy company.

San Miguel's offer, equivalent to A$6 a share of National Foods, topped the A5.45 a share bid of New Zealand dairy giant Fonterra Cooperative Group Limited. It represented a 28.5 percent premium to the Australian firm's closing price before Fonterra launched its bid in late October.

National Foods is Australia's biggest milk processor. Its products include milk, yoghurt, gourmet cheese and cream.

In a disclosure to the Australian Stock Exchange yesterday, the board of National Foods unanimously backed San Miguel's offer and recommended that stockholders accept the offer in the absence of a superior proposal. National Foods has rejected the unsolicited offer of Fonterra.

In a statement, San Miguel chair and chief executive officer Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. said National Foods, being one of Australia's leading consumer product companies, was a highly attractive acquisition for San Miguel.


THE FOOD and beverage giant under Cojuangco's (inset) leadership, aggressively pursues regional expansion

"The proposal reflects San Miguel's long-term strategic ambition of leveraging its core competencies to expand its presence in non-alcoholic beverages and food in selected countries in the Asia Pacific region," said Cojuangco.

"National Foods is a good strategic fit for San Miguel, and their management is strongly committed to growing the business. We recognize National Foods' strong growth prospects and believe closer links with our existing Australian and Asian operations will create opportunities for both companies," Cojuangco said.

"San Miguel welcomes the unanimous support of the Board of National Foods for our proposal," he also said.

Also in a statement, National Food chair David Crawford said," San Miguel's offer represents a premium of 28.5 percent to the closing share price prior to the Fonterra bid. The proposal is superior to Fonterra's offer which your board continues to consider grossly undervalues National Foods.

"The offer of A$6.00 per share is within 2 percent of the board's valuation range of A$6.11 to $6.65 per share, excluding the value of the franking credits accompanying the interim dividend," Crawford added.

San Miguel's offer price will be adjusted depending on the amount of the interim dividend and any other distributions paid to National Foods shareholders.

The offer was subject to it winning more than 50 percent of National Foods, which is about 19 percent owned by Fonterra.

The A$6 per share bid price included a 10 cents a share dividend, which National Foods intends to pay in January.

National Foods has entered into a "deed of undertaking " with San Miguel governing certain aspects of the expected deal.

San Miguel is reportedly planning to fund the acquisition from new debt facilities and existing cash on hand. The company has received underwritten commitments for debt facilities from ABN AMRO Bank N.V., Barclays Capital (the investment banking division of Barclays Bank PLC), The Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corp. Ltd., Standard Chartered Bank and Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corp.

San Miguel intends to make available the full terms of its offer within this month. The offer will be made by the company or a wholly owned subsidiary. *With a report from Reuters*

GOCC '04 budget deficit seen at ₱92B

By Michelle V. Remo

THE DEPARTMENT of Finance said the 14 government-owned and -controlled corporations (GOCCs) it was monitoring were projected to post a budget deficit that was much lower than the P125-billion ceiling it set for 2004.

This raised expectations of a better fiscal position for the entire public sector this outgoing year.

According to Finance Undersecretary Nieves Osorio, the combined deficits of the 14 GOCCs this year might reach only P92 billion. She attributed this to the expected lower-than-programmed deficit of National Power Corp., which accounts for the bulk of the GOCCs' combined deficit.

Osorio said that the heavily indebted Napocor, which targeted a budget deficit of P114 billion for 2004, would likely post a budget gap of only P80 billion.

Finance Secretary Juanita Amatong said the progress of the government's efforts to privatize Napocor's assets made it possible for the power agency to post a better-than-expected fiscal standing this year.

"There is a big improvement in the fiscal standing of the GOCCs, mainly because of Napocor's privatization. Together with this, the improved income of SSIs (social security institutions like Social Security System) is expected to result in a lower public sector deficit," said Amatong in an interview with the INQUIRER.

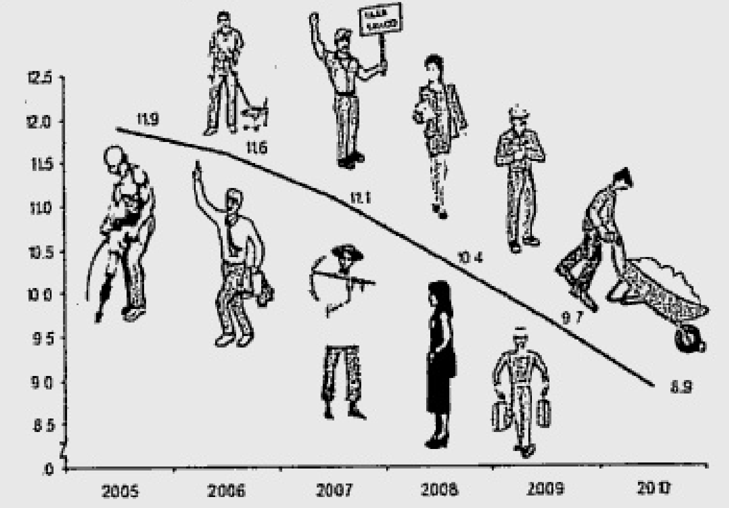
The 13 other monitored GOCCs include: National Electrification Administration, Local Water Utilities Administration, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, Home Guarantee Corp., National Housing Authority, Light Rail Transit Authority, Philippine National Oil Co., National Irrigation Administration, National Development Co., Philippine Ports Authority, Philippine Economic Zone Authority, and Philippine National Railways.

INQUIRER MONITOR

Figures that matter in our nation's life

Unemployment rate targets

(2005 to 2010, in percent)



Source: Medium-Term Philippine Development Plan: 2004-2010

DESPITE modest growth in gross domestic product, unemployment remained high in 2001 to 2003, averaging 11.3 percent during the period. Not enough employment opportunities were available for the country's increasing working population. To address these problems in the labor market, aside from job creation programs, the government aims to enhance the competency and productivity of workers to ensure global market competitiveness.

Maricar D. Tolosa, PDI Research

Gov't pushes for ethanol use in gasoline

By Abigail L. Ho

IN A bid to ease the country's dependence on imported oil, the Department of Energy is set to require all oil companies to produce and sell gasoline with ethanol content.

Under the DOE's updated Philippine Energy Plan (PEP), oil firms should be producing and selling gasoline with at least 10-percent blend of ethanol, or ethyl alcohol, by 2007. By 2010, gasoline sold in the domestic market should have at least 25 percent ethanol content.

Ethanol is produced when crops like sugar cane, cassava, corn and other agricultural feedstock are fermented and distilled.

Aside from being a gasoline blend, ethanol can also be used as a component of reformulated gasoline or as primary fuel with gasoline as a blend.

Under the country's energy independence package, ethanol would be used as a gasoline blend.

Industry leader Petron Corp. has expressed its commitment to blend ethanol with other fuels and ensure its availability in the mainstream market.

The Philippine Fuel Ethanol Alliance—composed of the Sugar Regulatory Administration, Center for Alcohol Research and Development Foundation Inc., Sugar Master Plan Foundation Inc. and the Philippine Sugar Millers Association—was formed in August to help promote ethanol use.

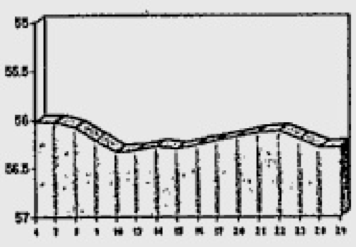
To further help the country develop its ethanol potential, the government of Thailand, through PTT, would be in close coordination with the Philippine government in conducting a study to develop ethanol as a fuel additive.

On a wider scope, both governments agreed to jointly develop harmonized regional fuel standards for ethanol-blended gasoline.

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES

PESO-DOLLAR RATE



DECEMBER

₱ 56.28 = $ 1
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 29, 2004

¥ 103.22 = $ 1
As of 5 p.m., Dec. 29, 2004

GOLD: $443.70-444.20
per ounce Hong Kong, Dec. 29, 2004

December 30, 2004 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.734538	1.000000	56.2670
Japan	Yen	0.007128	0.009704	0.5460
United Kingdom	Pound	1.416189	1.928000	108.4828
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.094498	0.128649	7.2387
Switzerland	Franc	0.648141	0.882379	49.6488
Canada	Dollar	0.603366	0.821423	46.2190
Singapore	Dollar	0.449204	0.611546	34.4099
Australia	Dollar	0.571758	0.778392	43.7978
Bahrain	Dinar*	1.948222	2.652309	149.2375
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.195872	0.266660	15.0042
Brunei	Dollar	0.447835	0.609682	34.3050
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000079	0.000107	0.0060
Thailand	Baht	0.018812	0.025611	1.4411
UAE	Dirham	0.200015	0.272301	15.3216
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.361400	76.6019
Argentina	Peso	0.247528	0.336984	18.9611
Brazil	Real	0.273073	0.371761	20.9179
Denmark	Kroner	0.134398	0.182969	10.2951
India	Rupee	0.016832	0.022915	1.2894
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.193325	0.263193	14.8091
Mexico	New Peso	0.065467	0.089127	5.0149
New Zealand	Dollar	0.530199	0.721813	40.6143
South Africa	Rand	0.130934	0.178253	10.0298
Korea	Won	0.000705	0.000960	0.0540
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.022937	0.031226	1.7570

INTEREST RATES

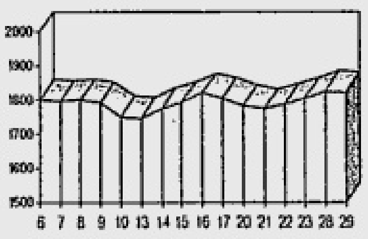
December 29, 2004- MART1 Rates Benchmark Interest Rates	MART 1 29-Dec-04	MART 1 28-Dec-04
1 Month	8.1589	8.2893
3 Months	8.395	8.4232
6 Months	9.3667	9.3679
1 Year	10.2433	10.2625
2 Years	11.3268	11.3411
3 Years	11.8217	11.8054
4 Years	12.4483	12.4429
5 Years	12.8554	12.8375
7 Years	13.415	13.4339
10 Years	13.8667	13.8357
20 Years	14.0143	14.0179
25 Years	14.4717	14.4536

STOCK MARKET

Shares close 0.17% lower

SHARE prices closed 0.17 percent lower last Wednesday as investors took profits on select blue-chips on the last trading day of the year, dealers said.

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B2)

Some last-minute window-dressing activity limited the main index's fall, they added.

The few investors left in the market continued to ignore the impact of Sunday's earthquake and tidal waves, which have left many coastal communities around south and southeast Asia devastated.

The exchange was closed for holidays yesterday and today. Trading will resume Monday next week.

The Philippine Stock Exchange composite index shed 3.15 points to 1,822.83. It moved between 1,814.88 and 1,832.15 points.

Turnover amounted to 1.39 billion shares worth P908.4 million, against 722.1 million shares worth P772.6 million on Tuesday.

The broader all-shares index closed up 0.53 points to 1,154.39.

Gainers beat losers 51 to 35, with 51 stocks unchanged.

For the full trading year, the main index gained 380.46 points or 26.38 percent, after finishing 2003 at 1,442.37 points.

"Investors took profits from recent gains ahead of the long New Year weekend," said Rommel Macapagal of Westlink Global Equities.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone was the most actively traded stock, ending P5 down to P1,360 .

Ayala Land rose 20 centavos to P7.30 , while San Miguel's A and B shares were unchanged at P59 and P75, respectively. *AFP*

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Children's Hour

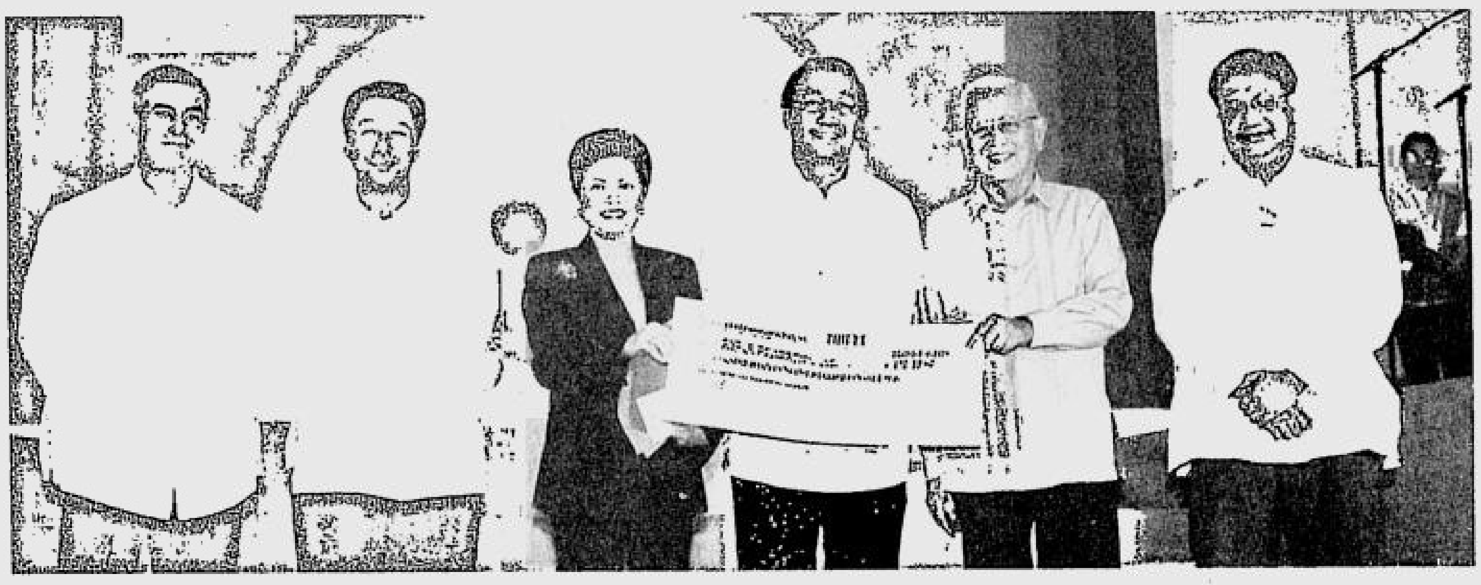
More Food for the Soul

Children's Hour raises funds by calling on individuals and companies to donate an hour's worth of their salary annually.

SOME 55 companies donated a total of P5.5 million to the Children's Hour during a benefit lunch, dubbed 'More Food for the Soul', at the NBC Tent, The Fort, on Dec. 16. Aside from the cash donations, the companies pledged an additional P1.6 million for 2005. Children's Hour also announced the beneficiary organizations. 'More Food For the Soul' was organized by Makati Business Club executive director and Children's Hour trustee Guillermo Luz. The full-course lunch was prepared by master chef Billy King.

Children's Hour raises funds by calling on individuals and companies to donate an hour's worth of their salary annually. Since August 2002, it has raised more than P33 million from 403 companies and 157,000 employees.

The donor companies include Union Bank, Landbank of the Philippines, AIG Group, Mirant Foundation, Makati Business Club, Nation Broadcasting Corp, Smart Telecommunications, Globe Telecom, Jollibee and Ayala Group of Companies, among others. For details, visit www.childrenshour.org.ph or email ask@childrenshour.org.ph.



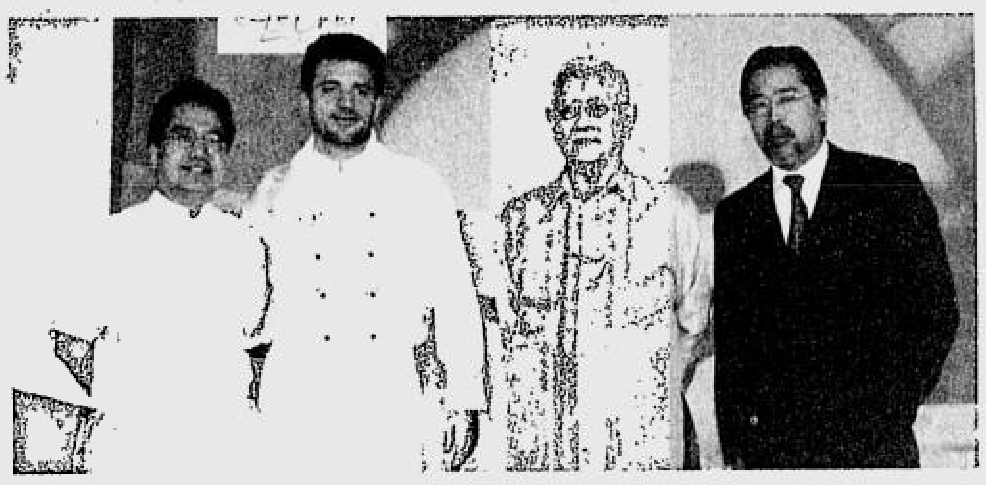
IMI

The Ayala Group of Companies shows its support for Children's Hour. Spearheaded by Ayala Corp CEO and Children's Hour Trustee Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala II (left), Ayala companies Integrated Microelectronics Inc (IMI), Globe Telecom and Global Data Hub Inc turns over the pledges of their respective companies. From left: Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala II; Arthur Tan, president of IMI; Ambassador Escaler; Reynaldo Huergas, managing director of Global Data Hub Inc; Ambassador Tan; and lawyer Roland Marquez, head of strategic staffing and employee relations of Globe Telecom.

UNIONBANK
JUSTO A. ORTIZ

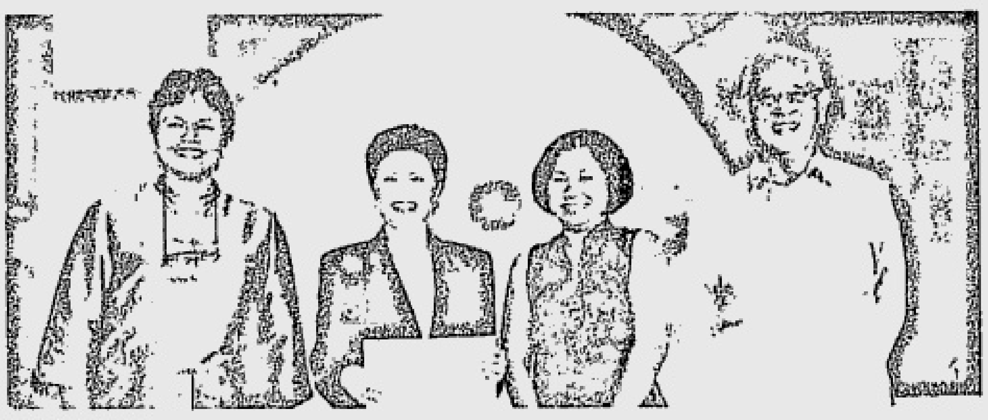
UNIONBANK

Unionbank, one of Children's Hour's top supporters, presents its pledge during the turnover. From left; Justo Ortiz, chair and CEO of Unionbank and Children's Hour trustee; Ambassador Escaler, Mary Goolsby, a consultant of Unionbank; Joseling Arce, first vice president of Unionbank; and Ambassador Tan.



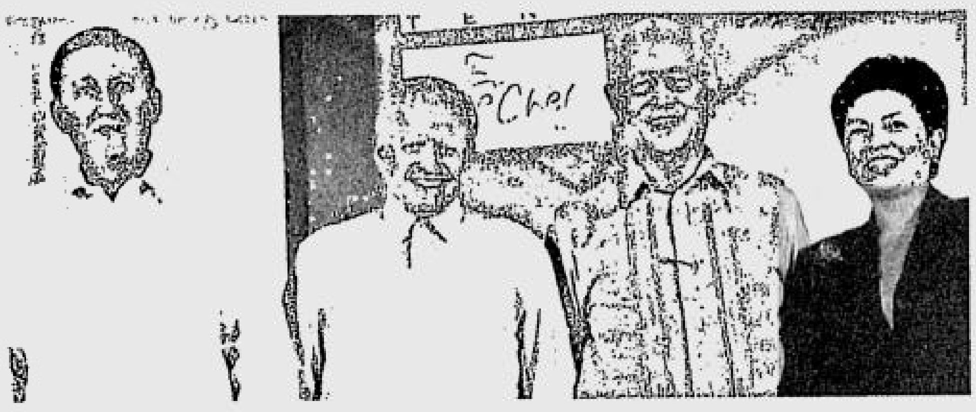
MAGIC 4

Children's Hour thanks its friends who helped make the benefit event possible. With Ambassador Tan are (from left): Francis Lumen, president of Nation Broadcasting Corp (NBC); Chef Billy King, Chef Patron and CEO of Le Chef; and Guillermo Luz, Makati Business Club executive director and Children's Hour trustee.



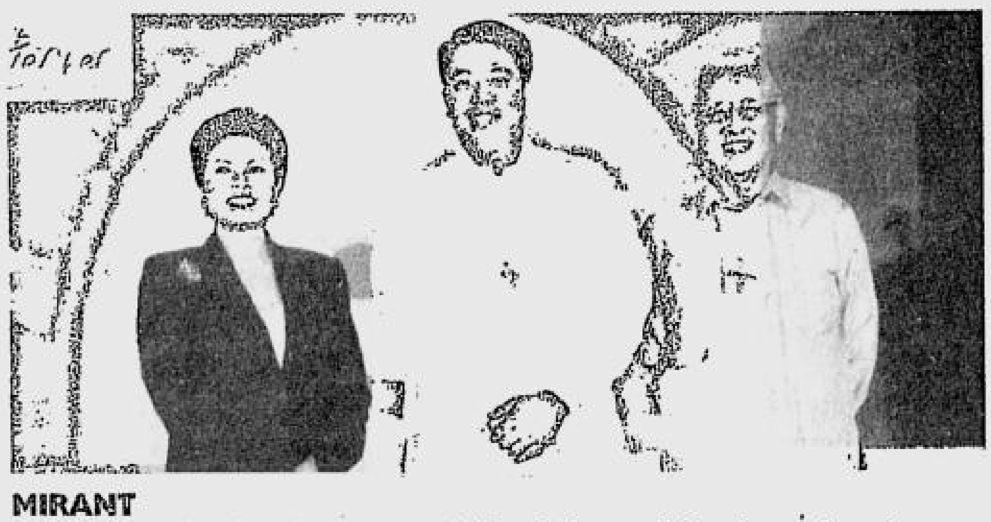
MCCANN

McCann Ericksson (Philippines) Inc, one of the leading advertising agencies and a strong supporter of Children's Hour, presents its employees' and corporate contribution. Shown are (from left): Emily Abrera, chair of McCann Ericksson and Children's Hour trustee; Ambassador Escaler; Dolor Jugo, finance manager of McCann Ericksson; and Ambassador Tan.



AIG

The American International Group Inc (AIG) Group of Companies presents its pledge at the Children's Hour annual benefit lunch. Shown are (from left): Anthony Sotelo, VP-HR for AIG; Jose Cuisia Jr, president of AIG and member of the board of trustees of Children's Hour; Ambassador Bienvenido A. Tan Jr, chair of Children's Hour Philippines; and Ambassador Narcisa Escaler, chair of the resource mobilization committee.



MIRANT

Mirant Foundation Philippines supports Children's Hour and Tuloy Foundation as it contributes to the Children's Hour Endowment Fund and directs a grant to Tuloy Foundation, one of the partner organizations of Children's Hour. Present at the turnover are (from left) Ambassador Escaler; Roberto Calingo, executive director of Mirant Foundation; and Ambassador Tan.

NBC
children's hour

HSBC

HSBC president Warner Geoffrey Manning (second from right) presents a direct contribution to Development Center for Handicapped Foundation Inc - Stepping Stone Learning, Resource and Therapy Center, an organization that caters to mentally handicapped children from indigent families. Present to accept the grant is Frederico Sevilla Jr, vice chair of said organization. Also shown are Ambassador Tan and Corazon Alma de Leon, chair of the project selection committee (right).

PLDT to cut debt by $540M in '05

By Clarissa S. Batino

PANGILINAN

TELECOMMUNICATIONS giant Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. plans to reduce its debt by $540 million next year as part of continued efforts to clean up its books.

According to PLDT chair Manuel V. Pangilinan, the country's biggest telecommunications company will settle $370 million in debt incurred by its fixed-line business, and another $170 million of the wireless units' obligations.

"If we could, we want to continue to reduce debts ahead of schedule. It is likely that we could pay down the fixed line debts higher than $370 million. The debt level should drop faster than anticipated," said Pangilinan.

He said the quick settling of debts will allow PLDT to save on interest payments and minimize currency risks.

PLDT kicked off an aggressive debt restructuring program this year, when it cut $350 million from its outstanding obligations.

The decision brought to $450 million the total borrowings retired in 2004.

PLDT promises a more aggressive debt payment program next year.

Of the PLDT group's outstanding $2.99 billion debt as of the third quarter, $2.2 billion is owed by the fixed-line business.

Wireless subsidiaries Smart Communications Inc. and Pilipino Telephone Corp., on the other hand, have a combined obligation of $718 million.

"By the end of the year, PLDT's fixed line debt balance would be about $2 billion, on track to achieving our target to reduce our debt balance to below $1.5 billion by the end of 2006," PLDT president Napoleon Nazareno said earlier.

PLDT said it prepaid part of the $145-million debt facility signed in September 2002 comprised of US dollars and Japanese yen. The telecom giant settled 7.276 billion yen and $35 million a week ago.

"We consider our efforts to accelerate our debt reduction program to be a prudent move that would not only generate interest savings but also improve our balance sheet profile and mitigate our risks exposure;" added Nazareno.

During a period of foreign exchange volatility, companies with huge dollar exposure like PLDT incur foreign exchange losses when the peso drops in value against major currencies.

This year, the telecom giant said it will likely book a P2-billion exchange loss out of its total "unhedged" debt.

The country's most profitable firm with a record net income of P20 billion in the first nine months is targeting to end the year with P24 billion in profits.

Pangilinan said the company's profit target this year would not be affected by the foreign exchange losses that may arise from the adoption of new international accounting standards.

Still in line with its debt reduction strategy, Pangilinan said PLDT has no plans of incurring fresh debt.

"We want to be able to generate sufficient revenue to hasten debt payment," he said.

This is why he is not concerned about any credit rating downgrade, saying it should not affect PLDT's bottom line and share price.

FLOOR traders at the Philippine Stock Exchange throw confetti after the last trading day of the year on Wednesday at Manila's financial district. The index ended the year 26 percent higher compared with the index close of 1,442.37 at the end of 2003. AP

Stock analysts ignore ruling of Sandiganbayan

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

STOCK market analysts see no drastic changes in the strategies and plans of San Miguel Corp. despite a Sandiganbayan ruling that affirmed government's claim over 27 percent of the country's biggest food and beverage firm.

San Miguel has embarked on an aggressive expansion plan, which its chair Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. hopes will bring it among the top 10 food and beverage firms in Asia by 2007.

Analysts said they were not surprised by the ruling of the Sandiganbayan that effectively forfeited the alleged coco levy-funded shares that cronies of the late Ferdinand Marcos bought in San Miguel and United Coconut Planters Bank.

San Miguel A and B shares closed unchanged last Wednesday at P59 and P75 per share, respectively.

Company sources and industry analysts added that they believed the recent ruling will not disrupt operations of the company, nor will any change in ownership foil San Miguel's attempt to conquer the Asia Pacific food and beverage market.

Cojuangco holds roughly over 19 percent of San Miguel's total issued shares, Kirin Brewery 15.6 percent, SM Investments Corp., the private holding firm of mall tycoon Henry Sy Sr. 6.3 percent, Government Service Insurance System with 6.6 percent and Social Security System at 5.3 percent.

No massive layoff despite Toshiba pullout, DTI says

By Ronnel W. Domingo

THERE will be no loss of jobs following Toshiba Corp.'s decision to transfer its PC notebook production line from the Philippines to China, according to Trade Secretary Cesar V. Purisima.

Purisima gave the assurance after speaking with Toshiba officials, who said the affected workers would be reassigned to Toshiba's high density drives production unit.

Purisima said Toshiba plans to increase its local production of HDDs by 20 percent to 1.2 million units per month in the first quarter of 2005, from a million units a month in the first half of 2004.

The expansion would definitely have an impact on the new technology and skills that the Filipino engineers and technicians would acquire, Purisima said.

Toshiba's move can also influence other electronics companies that produce similar products to consider the Philippines as their base of operations, he added.

"We are glad Toshiba has considered the Philippines as a preferred manufacturing site in its realignment program," he said.

"Toshiba's expansion of its HDD production is a vote of confidence on the country's ability to produce high-quality products," Purisima added.

He said the market for small-sized HDDs has been growing sharply, thanks to the emerging needs for their use in devices other than personal computers, such as digital home electronics and car electronics.

Industry data show that Toshiba's local production unit, Toshiba Information Equipment Philippines Inc., is one of the top five corporations in the Philippines in terms of sales.

According to the Semiconductor and Electronics Industries in the Philippines Inc., the world's top three makers of HDDs under 2.5 inches include Fujitsu, Hitachi Global Storage Technology and Toshiba—and their production plants are in the country.

One of Toshiba's three largest factories is located in the Laguna Technopark, where some 5,200 workers are employed.

Toshiba decided to stop manufacturing notebook computers at its Philippine plant by the end of the year, and shift production to its main PC factory in Hangzhou, China, to cut costs.

Hit by aggressive pricing by Hewlett-Packard Co. and Dell Inc., Toshiba in the last business year cut the earnings forecast for its PC and PC peripherals division three times, and is now restructuring the business.

Toshiba's Philippine plant, which is located in Laguna province and employs about 6,500 people, makes hard disk drives as well as notebook PCs.

The plant currently manufactures 100,000 notebook PCs a month, while Toshiba aims to double annual PC production at the Hangzhou plant to 3 million units by the year ending in March 2006.

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

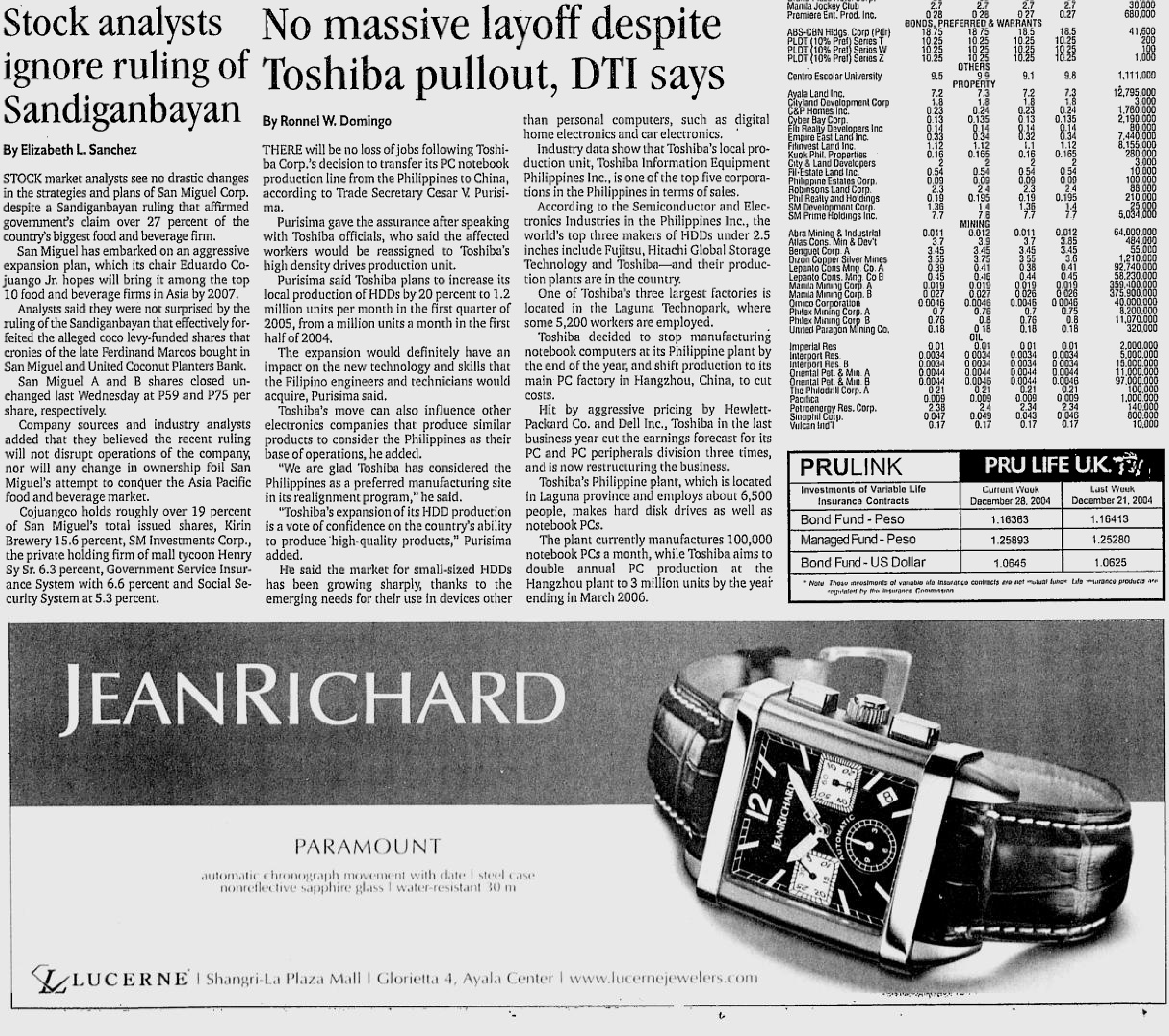
(As of December 29, 2004)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9	1,297,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	27.5	28	26.5	26.5	1,396,700
Bank of the Phil. Islands	52.5	52.5	52	52.5	1,485,100
China Banking Corp.	575	575	560	560	1,300
Citystate Savings Bank	17.25	17.5	17.25	17.5	3,000
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	47.5	48	47.5	48	22,000
Export and Ind. Bank Inc	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43	60,000
International Exch. Bank	16.75	16.75	16.75	16.75	263,500
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	27	27.5	26.5	26.5	409,800
Philippine National Bank	22.5	22.5	22.5	22.5	300
Philippine Trust Co.	34.5	34.5	34.5	34.5	896,000
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	14	14	14	14	12,100
Security Bank Corporation	28	29	28	29	85,700
Union Bank of the Phil.	23.75	23.75	23.75	23.75	1,100
FINANCIAL SERVICES					
ATR Kim Eng Fin. Corp.	2.2	2.4	2.2	2.4	40,000
First Abacus Financial	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	50,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	2480	2480	2480	2480	370
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.4	1.42	1.4	1.42	520,000
Phil. Stock Exchange Inc.	110	110	109	109	50,300
Sun Life Financial Inc.	1815	1830	1815	1830	2,700
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
Digital Telecom Phils Inc	1.76	1.76	1.7	1.74	9,645,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	965	965	950	955	2,400
Ipeople Inc	3.4	3.45	3.05	3.05	146,000
Island Info and Tech Inc.	0.043	0.043	0.043	0.043	1,000,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.034	0.034	0.033	0.034	500,000
Liberty Telecoms Holdings	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	370,000
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp	2.32	2.36	2.2	2.36	90,000
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	2.7	2.7	2.55	2.65	7,463,000
Transpacific Broadcast	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	15,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	1370	1375	1350	1360	171,930
Ivantage Corp.	0.66	0.68	0.65	0.65	22,440,000
Philweb Corp.	0.01	0.011	0.01	0.011	20,400,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. A	15.75	15.75	15.5	15.5	44,700
Manila Electric Co. B	24.75	24.75	24.5	24.75	358,000
Petron Corp.	3.25	3.25	3.2	3.25	2,383,000
Salcon Power Corp.	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	42,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	5.9	5.9	5.9	5.9	510,000
Keppel Phils. Marine Inc	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	10,500,000
Lorenzo Shipping Corp.	1.18	1.18	1.18	1.18	7,310,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Union Cement Corp.	1.96	2.02	1.96	1.98	7,058,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Alaska Milk Corp.	2.95	2.95	2.95	2.95	22,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	28	28.5	27.5	28.5	52,800
Pancake House Inc.	1.4	1.4	1.4	1.4	10,000
RFM Corporation	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	70,000
San Miguel Corp. A	58.5	59	58.5	59	68,300
San Miguel Corp. B	75	75	74	75	329,600
Vitarich Corp.	0.27	0.27	0.27	0.27	1,000,000
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.0048	0.0048	0.0046	0.0048	20,000,000
Abacus Con Res & Hdg B	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.005	8,000,000
Ayala Corporation	6.7	6.7	6.6	6.6	2,902,000
Alsons Cons. Res. Inc.	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.28	60,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	3.25	3.25	3.2	3.2	120,000
A. Soriano Corp.	1.56	1.58	1.56	1.58	44,000
APC Group Inc.	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	100,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	0.0075	20,000,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.68	1.72	1.68	1.72	40,000
Balabac Resources & Hldgs	0.83	0.83	0.75	0.75	130,000
Bacnotan Cons Indus Inc	16	16	16	16	8,400
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.68	0.69	0.67	0.68	20,460,000
Basic Consolidated Inc.	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	780,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.24	0.24	0.21	0.21	900,000
Southeast Asian Cement	0.11	0.115	0.11	0.115	670,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	3.7	3.85	3.7	3.8	8,018,000
Ever-Gotesco Resources	0.03	0.03	0.029	0.029	1,600,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.02	130,000
Fil-Hispano Holdings Corp	4.7	4.7	4.6	4.65	670,000
F&J Prince Holdings Corp.	0.79	0.8	0.79	0.8	20,000
F&J Prince Hldgs. B	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.02	10,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp	31	31	30	30	669,200
Global Equities Inc.	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	500,000
House of Investments Inc.	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	50,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc	2.75	2.8	2.7	2.7	1,006,000
Keppel Holdings	0.69	0.69	0.69	0.69	750,000
Macroasia Corp.	2.4	2.48	2.32	2.34	450,000
Medco Holdings	0.3	0.33	0.3	0.33	360,000
Megaworld Corp.	1.26	1.26	1.24	1.24	1,000,000
Multitech Inv. Corp.	0.29	0.29	0.28	0.28	400,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.34	0.34	0.32	0.32	9,940,000
Philcomsat Holdings Corp.	1	1	1	1	10,000
Prime Orion Phils. Inc.	0.15	0.15	0.15	0.15	450,000
East Asia Power Res. Corp	0.105	0.105	0.105	0.105	200,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.37	340,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.13	0.13	0.12	0.12	4,100,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.195	0.195	0.185	0.19	140,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Corro-Coat Inc.	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	5,000
Euro-Med Lab. Phil. Inc.	2.6	2.85	2.6	2.85	5,000
Music Semiconductors Corp	1.62	1.62	1.58	1.62	211,000
Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93	10,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.055	0.055	0.055	0.055	100,000
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICES					
Belle Corp.	0.61	0.61	0.59	0.59	700,000
Fairmont Holdings Inc.	0.98	1	0.95	0.95	2,140,000
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	0.5	0.57	0.5	0.55	150,000
Grand Plaza Hotel Corp.	33	33	33	33	1,000
Manila Jockey Club	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7	30,000
Premiere Ent. Prod. Inc.	0.28	0.28	0.27	0.27	680,000
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp (Pdr)	18.75	18.75	18.5	18.5	41,600
PLDT (10% Pref) Series T	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	200
PLDT (10% Pref) Series W	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	100
PLDT (10% Pref) Series Z	10.25	10.25	10.25	10.25	1,000
OTHERS					
Centro Escolar University	9.5	9.9	9.1	9.8	1,111,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	7.2	7.3	7.2	7.3	12,795,000
Cityland Development Corp	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	3,000
C&P Homes Inc.	0.23	0.24	0.23	0.24	1,760,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.13	0.135	0.13	0.135	2,190,000
Elb Realty Developers Inc	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	80,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.33	0.34	0.32	0.34	7,440,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.12	1.12	1.1	1.12	8,155,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.16	0.165	0.16	0.165	280,000
City & Land Developers	2	2	2	2	3,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.54	0.54	0.54	0.54	10,000
Philippine Estates Corp.	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	100,000
Robinsons Land Corp.	2.3	2.4	2.3	2.4	88,000
Phil Realty and Holdings	0.19	0.195	0.19	0.195	210,000
SM Development Corp.	1.36	1.4	1.36	1.4	25,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	7.7	7.8	7.7	7.7	5,034,000
MINING					
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.011	0.012	0.011	0.012	64,000,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	3.7	3.9	3.7	3.85	484,000
Benguet Corp. A	3.45	3.45	3.45	3.45	55,000
Dizon Copper Silver Mines	3.55	3.75	3.55	3.6	1,210,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.39	0.41	0.38	0.41	92,740,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.45	0.46	0.44	0.45	58,230,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	359,400,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.027	0.027	0.026	0.026	375,900,000
Omico Corporation	0.0046	0.0046	0.0046	0.0046	40,000,000
Philex Mining Corp. A	0.7	0.76	0.7	0.75	8,200,000
Philex Mining Corp. B	0.76	0.8	0.76	0.8	11,070,000
United Paragon Mining Co.	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	320,000
OIL					
Imperial Res	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	2,000,000
Interport Res.	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	5,000,000
Interport Res. B	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	0.0034	15,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.0044	0.0044	0.0044	0.0044	11,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.0044	0.0046	0.0044	0.0046	97,000,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	0.21	0.21	0.21	0.21	100,000
Pacifica	0.009	0.009	0.009	0.009	1,000,000
Petroenergy Res. Corp.	2.38	2.4	2.34	2.34	140,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.047	0.049	0.043	0.046	800,000
Vulcan Ind'l	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	10,000

PRULINK **PRU LIFE U.K.**

Investments of Variable Life Insurance Contracts	Current Week December 28, 2004	Last Week December 21, 2004
Bond Fund - Peso	1.16363	1.16413
Managed Fund - Peso	1.25893	1.25280
Bond Fund - US Dollar	1.0645	1.0625

* Note These investments of variable life insurance contracts are not mutual funds. Life insurance products are regulated by the Insurance Commission.



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Retailers expect cash registers to ring often in 2005

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

THE YEAR 2004 was not exactly an *annus horribilis* for the retail industry, and it has the burgeoning population and the unabated inflow of money from Filipino workers abroad to thank for it.

While some sectors of the economy almost ground to a halt the past year, the retail industry is estimated to have grown by 5 percent, the same pace recorded over the past three years.

Experts say the industry will not cool anytime soon, and can even surge if the economy finally kicks into high gear.

Having one of the highest birth rates in the world indeed has its benefits, according to Roberto S. Claudio, vice chair of the Philippine Retailers Association.

While the 2.4 percent annual population growth is frowned upon by analysts due to the strain on the economy and the country's finite resources, it augurs well for the retail industry.

Add to that the unrelenting exodus of Overseas Filipino workers, who bring in over $11 billion in remittances, the bulk of which go into consumption, rather than investments, and the Philippines gets a vibrant retail industry.

A cursory look at the country's malls, with customers leaving stores with plastic bags full of purchases, should be enough proof.

Big population

It makes one question the doomsayers' dire predictions that the Philippine economy will continue to languish in the cellar.

Claudio explained that unlike the other countries in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore and Hong Kong, the Philippines has a big local population that keeps retailers alive despite problems in the world economy.

With a population of 86 million, there is enough room for retailers to flourish within Philippine borders.

"We are getting about 1.6 million new shoppers a year because more people are joining the labor force and earning their own money," Claudio says.

He adds that the robust buying activity is not limited to the urban centers. Much activity is also going on in the rural sector, thanks to the improved incomes brought about by gains in the agriculture sector, the single biggest component of the Gross Domestic Product.

"There is still disposable income and at the end of the day, people still need to eat, have shelter and clothes. That is a natural source of growth for the retail industry," Claudio says.

He also cited the growing phenomenon of shrinking families, which leads to more family disposable income.

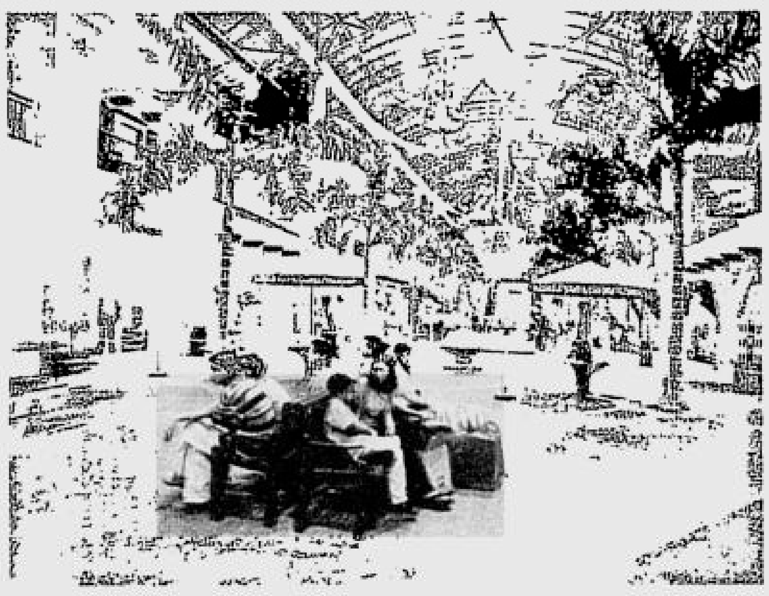
Claudio notes the experience of his firm Toby's, one of the country's leading distributors of sports goods and apparel, which continues to post solid growth despite the perceived faltering economy.

"Before, people used to have just one to two pairs of shoes. But now, Filipinos have an average of about four pairs of shoes," he says.

Rex Drilon II, chief operating officer of Greenhills Shopping Center developer Ortigas and Co., says his group was very optimistic about the prospects next year, estimating that the industry will grow by another 5 percent. And that is being conservative.

"The challenge is to grow faster. Retail has been growing because the price of copra has been growing. That means higher income from the rural population. That is why the malls are doing great. For us, our advantage is value-shopping, enabling us to grow at double-digit levels over the past three years," Drilon says.

THE RAPID population growth benefits retail companies.



MALLS will continue to do well in 2005.

He says with the economic situation such as it is, he expects companies that offer value products will do well next year, compared to those that cater to the high-end market.

Telco growth

Bienvenido Tantoco III, president of the Philippine Retailers Association, meanwhile, says the telecommunications industry was a clear winner in 2004.

Tantoco says while the retail industry grew by a significant 6.3 percent this year, a big portion of that spending was captured by the phone companies.

The latest survey on family expenditures, for instance, showed less money is being spent on food, and more money is invested in the purchase of phone cards for cellular phones.

This leaves little funds left over for other parts of the retail industry, but says there are still great opportunities for growth.

Filipinos themselves are very optimistic about the growth in the retail sector, according to the latest forecast of MasterCard International.

MasterCard said in its study on the retail prospects in Asia that retail sales are estimated to grow by 7 percent in the second half of the year, with total sales expected to reach some P352.3 billion.

The country received a superior score of 54.8 in the latest MasterIndex of Consumer Confidence compared to its score in the preceding period of 34.3.

The improvement was largely attributed to a very positive outlook on regular income at 80 and a relatively neutral stance on the economy at 53.

Conducted twice a year in June and December, the MasterIndex of Retail was launched in June 2003 by MasterCard as part of its knowledge leadership in Asia/Pacific.

It is among MasterCard's MasterIndex suite of research initiatives, providing six-month forecasts of retail sales growth in 12 markets: Australia, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan and Thailand.

"Over the next 12 months, we would likely see more of the same activity. I believe that there is some belt-tightening so the average basket size is becoming smaller. People are buying less but with more frequency," Tantoco says.

Greater competition

Tantoco adds the retail industry would be characterized by even greater competition, which will force companies to find their niche and protect it at all costs.

"You will really have to distinguish yourself so that the company will stand out and attract customers. Competition next year will make consumers even more demanding," he said.

Robina Gokongwei-Pe, group general manager of the Robinsons Department Store, shares Tantoco's view that the retail industry will be more challenging next year, given some pressure on the Filipinos' purchasing power.

As such, Gokongwei-Pe says that the prepaid phone cards will continue to be the winner next year, with more Filipinos choosing to put their money in communication.

She adds that there will also be good prospects next year for small-sized products or products sold in sachets or smaller containers.

"These will not necessarily be cheaper, but they are easier to buy because they are smaller," Gokongwei-Pe says.

She adds that the Robinsons group is holding off the completion of new malls next year, but will put its capital expenditure budget on the improvement and expansion of existing malls.

The Robinsons group just recently opened its latest mall, the Robinsons Pioneer, and Gokongwei-Pei says the reception has been on target.

"Generally, we performed better this year than last year but we see more challenges ahead," she adds.

PJ Masakayan, vice president for retail of Rockwell Land Corp., the owner of the Power Plant mall, also had a cautiously optimistic outlook on the retail industry, although the mall performed better this year compared to last year.

"Our market has displayed resilience. Of course our traffic does not compare with that of the bigger malls, but the spending power of those that do go here is higher," he says.

Masakayan says fashion remained the best-performing sector, with growth coming in at double-digit levels. Coming in next is food, which bounced back this year from a decline last year.

"For next year, we are still betting on fashion. We are doing some "creative leasing" or changing our tenant mix to increase sales," he says.

On the whole, the leading players of the retail industry are looking at inevitable growth next year, if only from the growth of the domestic base.

But if the economy will turn for the better, then retailers can expect those cash registers to add up higher sales.

RETAILERS mantra: Shape up or perish

Never too old for freebies

TAX-FILES

By Romulo S. Danao
and Emmylou G. Patnugot
SGV & Co.

GETTING ahead in years does not necessarily mean getting left behind in modern-day society. In fact, it is common in most countries around the world to grant special benefits and privileges to the elderly who are fondly referred to as "senior citizens." The usual benefits granted come in the form of housing assistance, medical assistance, reductions in tuition fees, reduction in transportation fares, and of course, reduction in income taxes. In some Western countries, more privileges are even given as one gets older. For example, in some states in the US, 65-year-olds get full social security benefits only if their income is less than $14,500 annually, but 70-year-olds get full social security benefits regardless of the amount of earned income.

Following the practice in other countries, the Philippine Congress enacted several laws granting certain privileges to our elderly. Republic Act (RA) No. 7432 also known as "An Act to Maximize the Contribution of Senior Citizens to Nation Building, Grant Benefits and Special Privileges and For Other Purposes" is the forerunner of a comprehensive program beneficial to senior citizens, their families and the rest of the community that they serve. This was followed by RA No. 9257 otherwise known as the "Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2003" which came into effect last March 21, 2004. The threshold age to qualify as a "senior citizen" has been set at 60 years of age.

The privileges under the Expanded Senior Citizens Act are personal in nature and they equally apply to all senior citizens. They cannot be transferred or endorsed to another member of the family or used without the actual presence of the senior citizen.

Under the Expanded Senior Citizens Act and its implementing regulations, the following privileges are available to our senior citizens:

1. Twenty percent discount from all hotels and similar lodging establishments; restaurants and recreation centers; purchases of medicines to be used by the senior citizen, as well as funeral and burial services to bury the senior citizen;

2. Lodging establishment includes tourist inn, apartel, motorist hotel, pension house and such other establishments that are regularly engaged in the hotel business but which are not registered as hotels by reason of inadequate essential facilities and services. Also, medicines refer to both prescription and nonprescription medicines;

3. Twenty percent discount on admission fees charged by theaters, cinema houses and concert halls, circuses, carnivals and other similar places of culture, leisure and amusement;

4. Exemption from payment of individual income taxes: Provided that their annual taxable income does not exceed the poverty level as determined by the National Economic and Development Authority (Neda) for that year.

The latest available poverty threshold annual per capita from the National Statistical Coordinating Board (NSCB) is for year 2002 in the amount of P11,906. Thus, it is safe to say that if the senior citizen's annual income is above P12,000 he must already pay income tax;

5. Exemption from training fees for socio-economic programs;

6. Free medical and dental service, diagnostic and laboratory fees such as but not limited to X-rays, computerized tomography scans and blood tests, in all government facilities;

7. Twenty percent discount on medical and dental services and diagnostic and laboratory fees, including professional fees of attending doctors in all private hospitals and medical facilities;

8. Twenty percent discount in fare for domestic air and sea travel;

9. Twenty percent discount in public railways, skyways and bus fare;

10. Educational assistance in pursuit of post secondary, tertiary, post tertiary, as well as vocational or technical education in both public and private schools through scholarships, grants, financial aid subsidies and other incentives to qualified senior citizens, including support for books, learning materials and uniform allowance: Provided, that the senior citizen shall meet the minimum admission requirement;

11. Continuance of the same benefits and privileges given by the Government Service Insurance System (GSIS), Social Security System (SSS) and PAG-IBIG, as the case may be, as are enjoyed by those in actual service;

12. Regular review of the retirement benefits of retirees from both the government and private sector to ensure their continuing responsiveness and sustainability, and if possible upgrade such benefits to be at par with those enjoyed by employees still in actual service;

13. Special discounts in special programs for senior citizens on purchase of basic commodities upon approval of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) or the Department of Agriculture (DA), whichever is applicable and

14. Provision of express lanes for senior citizens in all commercial and government establishments and where there are no express lanes, priority shall still be given to them.

To avail of the privileges listed above, a senior citizen or elderly person must submit proof of his/her entitlement by showing any of the following:

1. ID issued by the city or municipal mayor or the barangay captain of the place where the senior citizen or the elderly resides;

2. Passport of the elderly person or senior citizen concerned; and

3. Other documents that establish that the senior citizen or elderly person is a citizen of the Philippines and is at least 60 years old.

The establishment granting the listed privileges under (a), (f), (g) and (h) may claim the discounts as a tax deduction based on the net cost of the goods sold or services rendered. However, the cost of the discount is allowed as a "deduction from gross income" only for the same taxable year that the discount is granted. For example, all discounts given in 2004 should be allowed as a tax deduction from the company's gross income for 2004, not the years before or after. Further, the total amount of the claimed tax deduction net of the value-added tax (VAT), if applicable, shall be included in a company's gross sales receipts for tax purposes and shall be subject to proper documentation.

It should be noted that under the older law, RA No. 7432, the cost of the 20 percent discount from all establishments relative to utilization of transportation services, hotels and similar lodging establishments, restaurants and recreational centers and purchase of medicines anywhere in the country may be claimed as "tax credit" which was construed as a direct deduction from the tax due and payable to the government.

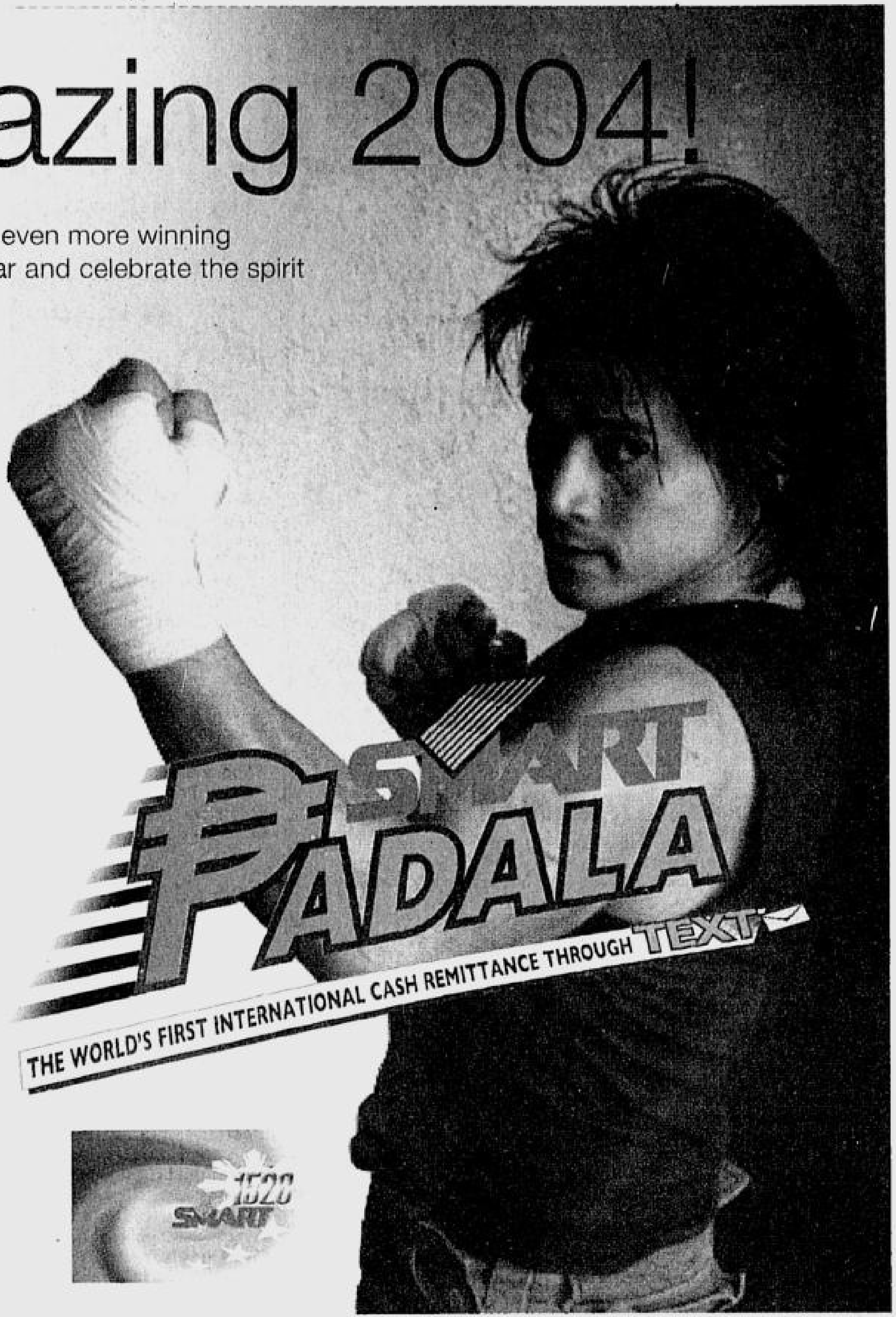
The BIR has objected to the treatment of the discount as a tax credit rather than a mere deduction from gross income. This issue was remedied in the newer law, RA No. 9257, which expressly provides that specific discounts granted by establishments may be claimed merely as a tax deduction from the company's gross income and not as a tax credit.

The privileges enumerated above only pertain to those directly given to senior citizens but the Expanded Senior Citizens Act also grants certain benefits to employers of senior citizens, centers and residential care/group homes for senior citizens for certain activities that they may perform. In this sense, this piece of legislation promotes full support to the total well-being of our senior citizens.

A Simply Amazing 2004!

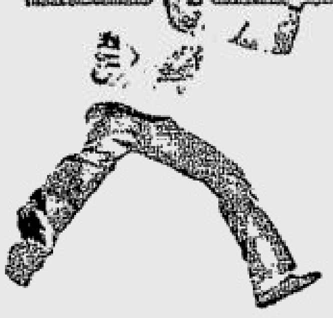
SMART Communications bids farewell to 2004 and looks forward to even more winning services for 2005. Let us take a look at the highlights of the past year and celebrate the spirit of insight and innovation.

The Year in Life-Changing Innovations and Unforgettable SMART Moments


SMART
PADALA
THE WORLD'S FIRST INTERNATIONAL CASH REMITTANCE THROUGH TEXT
1528
SMART

Robin Padilla inspires OFWs. SMART Padala is the world's first text-based remittance service.1528 SMART gave Filipinos in Hong Kong roaming-free access to SMART services and innovations

i-Chat
amp
ADDICT MOBILE PREPAID
Addict Skins
'bloG'



The same hip, fashionable and active downloads are now for the entire barkada. With Addict Mobile Prepaid, now you're in.

SMART Buddy Pre-Paid
Caller ringtunes
friendster
zed
Finder
POW GAL
POW GUY
PIX
TXT
Pasa

SMART Pasaload was so revolutionary an innovation that it won at the GSM Congress in France

2004 was a year of continuous innovation as SMART introduced new services and features like the Caller Ring and Ring Back Tunes, PasaLoad for as low as P2.00, new download stations, PasaLoad for the post-paid market, the SMART Buddy Super SIM 3, the PasaLoad tie-up with McDonald's, the new Mega SIM of Talk 'N Text, and Addict Mobile's Skins and Blogs. All were directed at specific needs of the market. Each new offering a product of SMART'S effort to listen to its clients and provide only the best customer experience possible. Not only did SMART extend its reach here in the country it also heard the cry of Filipinos overseas. In the second half of the year, SMART introduced SMART Padala, the world's first cash remittance service via text and 1528 SMART, a new SIM offered in Hong Kong which gives Filipinos based there preferential calling/texting rates to the Philippines and roaming-free access to SMART services. Now, keeping in touch is even more affordable for our kababayans abroad.

Sports have always played an important role in the life of the country. So, SMART was there at the beginning of the PBA season through the new recruits of the Talk 'N Text team. It welcomed the 67th season of UAAP and Addict Mobile cheered on as Ateneo, FEU, and La Salle headed to the finals. These young athletes demonstrated sportsmanship on the court and made us all proud. But no athlete made us prouder this year than professional boxer Manny Pacquiao as he delivered the final knockout of the season right here on Philippine soil. Through Talk 'N Text the Yanig sa Taguig event was organized to give Filipinos a chance to watch their idol live giving his best at the ring.

As 2005 begins, a new beginning dawns for residents of the SMART Amazing Village at the Baseco Compound in Tondo. About two hundred homeless families saw their new homes co-built with SMART employees and Gawad Kalinga, this was a blessing after their old houses were razed to the ground in a disastrous fire. Their story is one of new beginnings and new vision, the hope and inspiration that carry all of us into the new year.

Manny Pacquiao stares down destiny at Yanig sa Taguig

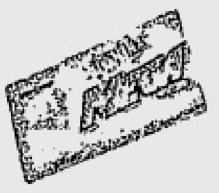
Talk 'N Text Phone Pals at the start of another exciting PBA Season

Addict Mobile was a driving force at this year's UAAP Men's Basketball Championships

The nation's stars sing their hearts out "I Love SMART"

ERSITY
15
SMART
Kid
The FIRST Cellfone for Kids

This year SMART Kid was born, serving a segment no one else dreamt of recognizing.

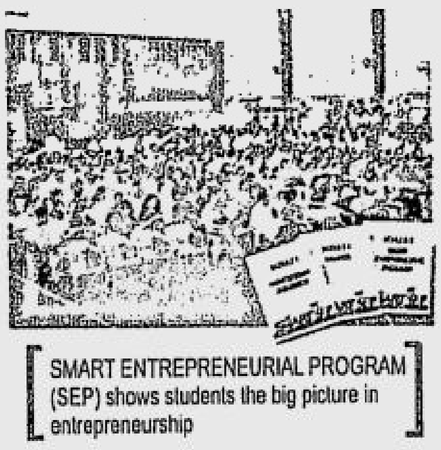


Talk 'N Text continues to serve more people with innovations such as Talk 'N Text Partner, Talk N' Text Padala and Talk 'N Text Pasaload

SMART Infinity
GOLD

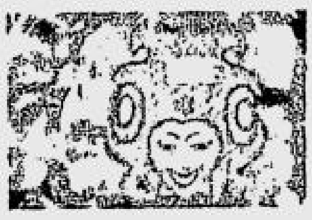
SMART made a stellar appearance at the FAP Awards '04

Media darling Jasmine Trias made a SMART homecoming to the delight of millions of fans



SMART ENTREPRENEURIAL PROGRAM (SEP) shows students the big picture in entrepreneurship

FiestAmazing SMART in 2004



I ♥ SMART
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A well established regional golf company urgently requires candidates for the following positions:

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- Articulate, competent, committed and consistent. Superb skills in communications, client relations and negotiation
- Computer literate and adept at research and the Internet
- Experience in developing consumer service products is an asset
- International driving license an advantage

Graphic Designer/Copywriter

- Bachelor's degree in any fine arts or mass communications course
- Able to conceptualize and design software based and freehand based creatives
- Knowledge of usual graphic design software and all office applications is an expected requisite.
- Web design skills are an advantage
- Strong writing skills. Experience as a writer is a strong advantage
- Presentable with good communication and presentation skills.
- Single female not more than 28 years of age

EVENTS ASSISTANT (PART-TIME)

- Experience in managing events is a plus but must have experience in working at trade shows or golf tournaments
- Pleasant looks and disposition (Must include photo) with good customer and client relations
- A bachelor's degree in any field is an advantage
- Single female not more than 26 years of age
- This temporary position is based in the Philippines
- Please quote expected remuneration on a per day and per month basis

CUSTOMER SERVICE OFFICER

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Important requirements:

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Crane Operator – must hold a valid crane operator certificate. With experience in handling Seatrax crane.
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Floorman / Roughneck – with 2 years experience as roughneck in offshore oil exploration rig
Pumpman – with 2 years experience as pumpman in offshore oil exploration rig or tanker vessel
Barge Operator – must hold a valid crane operator certificate with at least 3 years offshore experience.
Toolpusher – must hold a valid IWCF or IADC certificate with at least 5 years offshore experience as driller or toolpusher.

Other Drilling Personnel

Mechanic – with 3 years offshore experience as mechanic.
Motorman – with 3 years experience as motorman in an offshore oil exploration rig or tanker vessel.
Welder – must be a certified welder with onshore or offshore experience.
Boilermaker / Fitter – must be a certified welder with onshore or offshore experience.
Painter Foreman / Painter – with experience in technical mechanical blasting & spray painting, paint application.
Electrician – with at least 5 years offshore experience with perfect understanding of electrical diagram.
Storekeeper / Material Controller – with 2 years experience as storekeeper on onshore / offshore oil drilling rig.

Production Personnel

Production Supervisor – with experience in oil & gas plant & knowledge in Hydrocarbon processing. With good leadership skills.
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Electrical Technician – with 2 years experience on offshore / 5 years onshore oil production platform or refinery.
Laboratory Technician – with 2 years experience as Lab technician in the hydrocarbon processing plant.
Diver – must hold a valid diver certificate recognized by IMCA (International Marine Contractors Association). With welding knowledge is an advantage.
Safety Officer / HSE – with experience as offshore safety officer. With knowledge in administration of PTW system.

Supervisory Level Personnel

Electrical Engineer Specialist – BS Electrical Engineering graduate with experience in Electrical Engineering & design with application in oil & gas industry.
Mechanical Engineer Specialist – BS Mechanical Engineering graduate with experience in Engineering & Design of Mechanical Systems with experience in Petrochemical Industry
Instrumentation Engineer Specialist – BS Electrical Engineering graduate with experience in Instrumentation Engineering & Design with application in oil & gas industry.
Civil Engineer – BS Civil / Structural Engineering graduate with experience in engineering, design, construction industry including petrochemical heavy construction with a variety of projects plus 1 year minimum field construction experience.
Instrument Drafting Designer – BS Electrical / Instrumentation Engineering graduate with experience in design drafting work related to oil & gas industry. With experience in autocad.
Electrical Drafting Designer – BS Electrical Engineering graduate with experience in design drafting work related to oil & gas industry. With experience in autocad.
Drafting Designer (Mechanical & Process) – BS Mechanical Engineering graduate experience in design drafting work related to oil & gas industry. With experience in autocad.
Chief Electrician – BS Electrical Engineering graduate. With 5 years experience in offshore / onshore oil exploration projects
Chief Mechanic – BS Mechanical Engineering graduate. With 5 years experience in offshore / onshore oil exploration projects
Chief Electronic Engineer – BS Electronics Engineering graduate. Knowledge of all technical calculations required for electronic operation of the drilling unit and basic computer skills.

We may consider personnel in all above positions with minimum 5 years onshore experience.

Marine Personnel

Tug Master – Master Mariner or Chief mate licensed with at least 2 years continuous sea going experience. With tugboat experience is an advantage.
Anchor Handling Master – Master Mariner or Chief mate licensed with 2 years continuous sea going experience. Experience in Azimuth Stern Drive or with tug / supply vessel is an advantage.
Dynamic Positioning Operator – with Dynamic Positioning training courses. With valid chief or 2nd mate license, with at least 5 years marine experience.
Ballast Control Operator – with stability courses, GMDSS, General Operator license, chief or 2nd mate license, with at least 5 years marine experience.
Cargo Supervisor – must be a chief or 2nd mate licensed with VLCC experience.
Barge Master – Chief mate licensed with minimum 3 years offshore experience.

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PUBLIC NOTICES

LEGAL NOTICE

Notice is hereby given that the estate of the late FELIX D. SANDIKO has been extrajudicially settled with an affidavit of self-adjudication by his heir as per Doc #442 Page 90 Book XVIV Series of 2004 before Atty. Alfonsp C. Villamil, Jr. of Pangasinan (PDI-Dec.31,2004,Jan.7&14,2005)

Notice is hereby given that the estate of ADELAIDA E. PASAMBA consisting of cash deposited at UCPB Savings Account at Tanay, Rizal has been settled extrajudicially by her heirs, as per Doc No. 532, Page No. 95, Book No. XXII, Series of 2004 of Notary Public Rufino P. Quintiong of Rizal Province.
PDI-Dec 24, 31 & Jan 7, 2005

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Whoever
finds
his life
will
lose it,
and
whoever
loses his
life for my
sake will
find it.
Matthew 10:39

* * *

CONCEPCION LIM TINTOC

Died in the Grace of our Lord
on December 24, 2004 at the age of 76
in Los Angeles, California

She is survived by her loving husband, **Vicente S. Tintoc**; children **Eduardo** and **Judy**, **Evelyn** and **Ricardo**, **Esther** and **Peter**, **Eugene** and **Nicole**; grandchildren **Vincent**, **Vernon**, **Robert**, **Samantha**, **Pamela**, **Christopher**, **Jennifer** and **Nicholas**.

Her remains lie in state at Santuario de San Antonio, Capella dela Virgen, Forbes Park, Makati beginning December 31, 2004.

Interment will be on Wednesday, January 5, 2005 at Manila Memorial Park, Sucat after 8:00 A.M. Mass at Santuario de San Antonio.

* * *

"Each man is a friend
and each goes away helped..."

In Loving Memory
on the Fifth Anniversary of his Death
(December 31, 1999)

FELIPE QUE CHUA, M.D.

of Quezon City and Batac, Ilocos Norte

The family requests his relatives and friends to offer prayers for the eternal peace of his soul. Mass will be celebrated with family and friends at the Mount Carmel Crypts at 10:00 a.m.

Other scheduled masses are offered at the following:

CHRIST THE KING CHURCH E. Rodriguez Sr. Ave., Quezon City	6:30 a.m.
HOLY EUCHARIST PARISH MOONWALK CHURCH Moonwalk Village, Parañaque	7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m.
NATIONAL SHRINE OF OUR LADY OF LOURDES CHURCH Kanlaon St., Quezon City	7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.
MARY THE QUEEN PARISH Grant St., Greenhills	6:00 a.m.
CHRIST THE KING CHURCH Green Meadows, Quezon City	6:00 p.m.
SANCTUARIO DE SAN ANTONIO Forbes Park, Makati City	6:00 p.m.
IMMACULATE CONCEPCION PARISH CHURCH Batac, Ilocos Norte	6:30 a.m.
STS. PETER AND PAUL METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL Tuguegarao City, Cagayan Valley	5:15 p.m.
SAN JACINTO (ERMITA) CHURCH Tuguegarao City, Cagayan Valley	5:15 p.m.
SAN ISIDRO LABRADOR CATHEDRAL Malaybalay City, Bukidnon	5:30 p.m.
CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION Burtonsville, MD, USA	9:00 a.m.
ST. JOSEPH CHURCH Amherst, OH, USA	9:00 a.m.
NATIONAL SHRINE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPCION Washington D.C., USA	10:30 a.m.
ST. MARY'S OF THE MILLS Laurel, MD, USA	10:30 a.m.
SACRED HEART CATHOLIC CHURCH Nacogdoches, TX, USA	10:30 a.m.
ST. MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC CHURCH Paintsville, KY, USA	5:30 p.m. (Jan. 1, 2005)
ST. AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY North Brunswick, NJ, USA	9:00 a.m.

An obituary with a picture can be a fitting tribute to your departed loved one.

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❷ Any identification document (I.D.)

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Our Dearly Beloved

Deogracias E. "Asias" Escarte, M.D.

of Somerton, Philadelphia, U.S.A.

Peacefully joined our Lord on
December 28, 2004 at the age of 81.

Devoted husband of Felicitas (nee Hizon) Escarte, M.D.; Loving father of Maria Aramburo and her husband Jose Jr., M.D., and Arlina Hendrickson and her husband Orville. Beloved grandfather of Joel, Marjorie, Jody, Marcella, Jorel Aramburo, Rosemarie, Renee and great grandfather of Manny. Dear brother of LEODEGARIO (†), EDGARDO ESCARTE, Purificacion E. de Joya, Adelaida E. Ingram, CONSOLACION (†) and LETICIA E. PASCUAL, friends and other relatives request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

Interment will be on Friday, December 31, 2004 at RESURRECTION CEMETERY, after the Funeral Mass, 11:30 A.M. at St. Christopher Church, Proctor Rd., Philadelphia, U.S.A.

WE DESIGN OBITUARY FOR FREE.

ELANO "Sening" SIA

Passed away in the Grace of Our Lord
on December 28, 2004 in the US.

Beloved husband of **Connie** and devoted father of **Marvic**, **Chris**, and **Glenn**. Never to be forgotten, and will always be missed by his 7 grandchildren, 3 sisters, and 3 brothers.

Please remember him in love, friendship, and in your prayers.

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Philippines MCPo Box 2102 Tel. No. 893-6001/1320

PHILIPPINE NATIONAL OIL COMPANY PRIVATIZATION OF PNOC ENERGY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

The Philippine National Oil Company (PNOC), through the PNOC-EDC Privatization Committee (PNOC-EDC PRIVACOM), has approved the privatization of PNOC Energy Development Corporation, a company engaged in the exploration, delineation, development, and exploration of economically viable geothermal resources.

PNOC-EDC PRIVACOM is now inviting prospective Financial Advisors to advise, guide and assist in the design, planning, preparation and implementation of the progbram for the privatization of PNOC-EDC.

Prospective financial advisors must meet all of the following criteria:

- Has experience as financial advisor to governments on privatization in the power sector, with transaction amounting to at least US$500 million
- Has track record in working with the Philippine Government (in particular DOF and BSP). its government owned and controlled corporations or its government financial institutions, either as an advisor for privatization or arranger bank for financing.
- Has established working relationship with PNOC, PNOC-EDC and other subsidiaries of PNOC, either as an advisor for privatization or arranger bank for financing
- Has experience in lead-managing public equity offerings and arranging equity sales, both globally and in Asia
- With representative office in the Philippines
- Has indicated availability and commitment to deploy in the country a dedicated team with experienced in power and geothermal energy

Qualified parties may secure eligibility forms during regular office hours from PNOC-EDC Contracts Administration Group- BAC Secretariat c/o B.F. Salvador from January 7, 2005 at 1st Floor, Building 5, PNOC Complex, Fort Bonifacio, Taguig, Metro Manila. Deadline for submission of accomplished forms to the same office shall be on January 14, 2005 (Friday) at 12:00 noon. Eligible bidders shall then be notified by January 21, 2005.

For further inquiries, please contact the BAC Secretary, Mr. M. R. Rodriguez at telephone no. 893-1320 local 5420.

BAC Chairman

(PDI--Dec. 24 & 31, 2004)

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NOTICE

Please get in touch with the Members Assistance Center, Social Security System (SSS), East Avenue, Diliman, Quezon City or at any SSS office nearest your place of residence and file your death benefit claim within 90 days upon publication, if you are:

	NAME OF BENEFICIARIES	LAST KNOWN ADDRESS	NAME OF SSS MEMBER	DATE OF DEMISE
1)	Loreta Ramos Añana Macario Añana	1446 J. F. Blvd., Cavite City	Narciso R. Añana SS#03-4912135-2	October 10, 2004
2)	Arlene Bacalanmo Allene Bacalanmo	Tagum, Davao del Norte Bicol Province	Raynaldo B. Bacalanmo SS#09-0140972-6	January 15, 2004
3)	Antonio Jaca & Children	2139 Simeon St., Tondo, Manila	Roberto Bautista SS#33-1302988-5	September 8, 2004
4)	Josefina Gregorio	Unknown	Elmedio J. Damasco SS#03-3719174-7	July 23, 2004
5)	Gertrudes B. De Jesus	340 Bayan Luma, Imus Cavite	Julio L. De Jesus SS#03-1605331-4	September 27, 2004
6)	Virginia Montalvo Dela Cruz	23 Pag-asa, Caloocan City	Alex T. De la Cruz SS#03-2766863-3	October 2, 2004
7)	Juliet M. Gaspar	Loiz St. Rosario Village, Lagao, Gen. Santos City	Melchor R. Gaspar SS#09-1544755-4	October 25, 2004
8)	Alicia Informo	1015 Guevara, Sta. Cruz, Manila	Jovito P. Lucban SS#03-4562392-2	August 18, 2000
9)	Florentina Madolaria	Unknown	Gregoria Madolaria SS#03-0725368-6	November 2, 2004
10)	Rosario, Oliver & Jennifer	Olongapo City	Mariano Merza, Jr. SS#02-0219206-2	June 30, 2003
11)	Ma. Terisita G. Villareal	110 Osmeña St., Bo. Magsaysay, Tondo, Manila	Carlito Minoza SS#03-7960685-0	March 24, 2000
12)	Presentacion Monitzon	Maduya, Carmona, Cavite	Dionisio Monitzon SS#03-3260318-8	November 9, 2004
13)	Maneta Mata	Claveria, Misamis Oriental	Romulo C. Odog SS#08-0799645-6	November 8, 2004
14)	Armando Orbita	Anabu 2nd, Imus, Cavite	Leonora B. Orbita SS#33-2289266-3	August 4, 2004
15)	Roberto Paler	830 Baan St., Butuan City	Guadalupe Paler SS#06-2066787-8	March 3, 2002
16)	Luzviminda Pescadero & Jasmen	Hda. Anita, Toboso, Negros Occidental	Julito Pescadero SS#07-1376180-1	July 12, 2004
17)	Thelma Cantos Rom	Calapan, Oriental Mindoro	Rene Rom SS#33-4380628-5	July 18, 2004
18)	Rosella Salo	Unknown	Rodrigo Salo SS#06-0539925-5	September 13, 2004
19)	Pricila Mendoza Rolando Sierra	Javalera, Gen. Trias Cavite	Ernesto D. Sierra SS#03-4160484-4	August 13, 2004
20)	Mariano Tucay	Unknown	Lucita Tucay SS#07-1338423-3	September 10, 2003

Nothing Follows

(PDI – December 31, 2004)

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Advance Credit Corporation 23rd Flr., Tower I, The Enterprise Center, 6766 Ayala Ave. cor. Paseo de Roxas, Makati City. Look for Ms. Fe Jose or call at Tel. nos. (02) 886-3389 to 90 or **Advance Credit Corp. Bldg.** Melencio Extn. Cor. 29th St., Kapt. Pepe Subd. Cabanatuan City. Look for Ms. Marivic Calica or call at Tel nos. (044) 463-5318; 464-2767 to 68.

NOTICE OF DISSOLUTION

Notice is hereby given that the Amended Articles of Incorporation of **ACM PLASTIC PHILIPPINES CORP.** shortening the term of its existence up to September 30, 2004 thereby dissolving the said corporation on said date have been approved by its Board of Directors.

All persons having claims against said corporation is requested to present same at **Lot 7 Block 31 Kiel St., Mercedes Village, Cainta, Rizal.**

This announcement will serve as notice to all concerned of the legal dissolution of the aforesaid corporation.

(Sgd) **RAMIL L. LOPEZ**

(PDI - Dec. 17, 24 & 31, 2004)

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Editor Chelo Banal-Formoso

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When Paris beckons

Japanese Tatsuki Takino and Laotian-French Linda Vongdara, are among many fashion designers who have flocked to the fashion capital from other countries

PARIS—Indian designer Janak Datwani, the creative force behind the Nitya fashion house, came to Paris nearly 30 years ago at the age of 15 to gain experience in the industry and never left.

He's among many fashion designers who have flocked to the fashion capital from other countries as far flung as Venezuela and Japan.

Unrivalled for its beauty, charm, romance, elegance and passion, Datwani said the French capital inspired the "art of garment making" that London, Milan and New York could not match.

"Paris is a very inspiring place to be when you design. Your outside influences your inside," he said.

And he's not the only one. Other foreign fashion designers choose to live in Paris, rather than just come to present their collections at Paris' fashion weeks, because it places them in the window of world fashion.

Designer Oscar Carvallo moved to Paris last year after a decade of doing couture in his native Venezuela and has so far presented three collections here.

"I think French people are very open to foreigners, the French love foreigners, they appreciate the art from Africa, from South America, from Asia, from everywhere, it's a melting pot," he said.

The 39-year-old said he drew the inspiration for his designs from Latin America, the Amazon jungle and native Indians, produced the clothes in Italy but presented them in Paris.

Describing the city as the "center of fashion for the world," Carvallo said he finally decided to base himself in France after stints in Milan, Rome and Turkey because his clothes went down well here.

"I'm a bit heavy metal, a bit rock in my collection, that could be more London. But what I like from the French [is] that they have the balance of being an artist and of being a designer," he said.

Young foreign designers starting out agree. Tatsuki Takino, 24, who was born in Japan, is president and designer of Tengu Karasu, and got into fashion design last year after working as a model.

He said support from the Paris city authorities through the GEAI program was one reason for putting the fashion house's roots down here. Financial help, advice and contacts with factories and suppliers greatly helped, he said.

Show window

But he also stressed that Paris was the "show window" for world fashion, and that with the Middle East as one of their biggest markets, Paris drew people from that region more than Milan.

Linda Vongdara, also 24, who was born in France though her parents are from Laos, said young designers faced "enormous competition" in Paris, which was one reason she chose to specialize in corsetry.

"We are really drowning under a wave of young designers and there are so many of them that in the end they are really anonymous," she said.

Both Vongdara's and Tengu Karasu's clothes are produced in France.

Meanwhile, long-established designer Janak Datwani, whose line Nitya has 80 points of sales all over the world for its contemporary, Orient-inspired designs, said Paris was superior to Asia for design marketing capabilities.

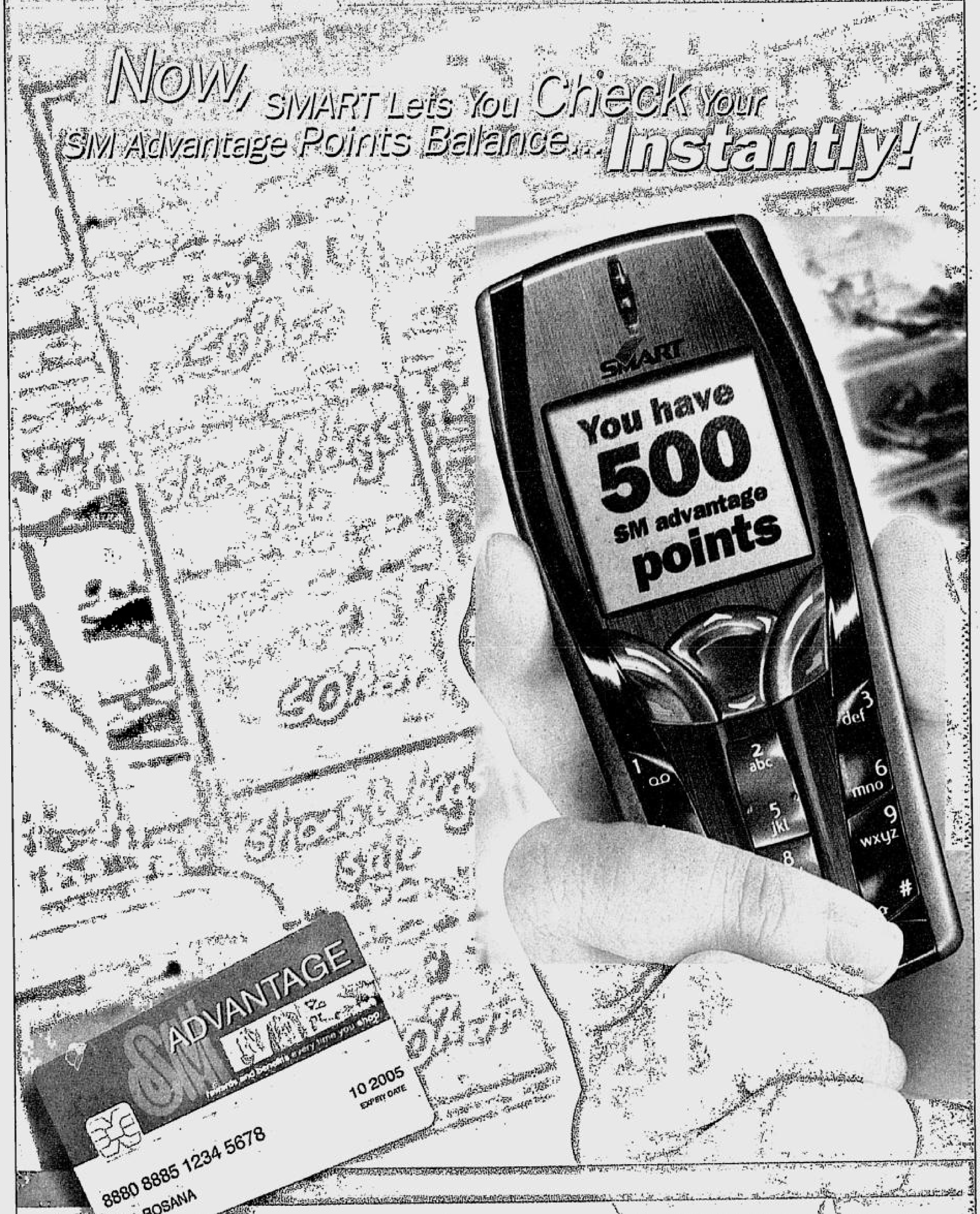
Paris was also geared up with good facilities, access and networking, and France had greatly opened up to the world economy in the last 30 years, he said..

And the 43-year-old said he believed that the inspiration from being in the City of Lights produced the high quality of craftsmanship found in Paris' haute couture ateliers.

"I would not even think of moving from Paris to London because it does not have the same sophistication," he said.

Nitya's clothes are designed in Paris by a team of eight European designers but the manufacturing takes place in India, China, Hong Kong and Italy depending on the type of product.

France is the leading market for Nitya, followed by Britain, he said. But Belgium, Spain, Japan, the Middle East and United States are also important markets. *AFP*



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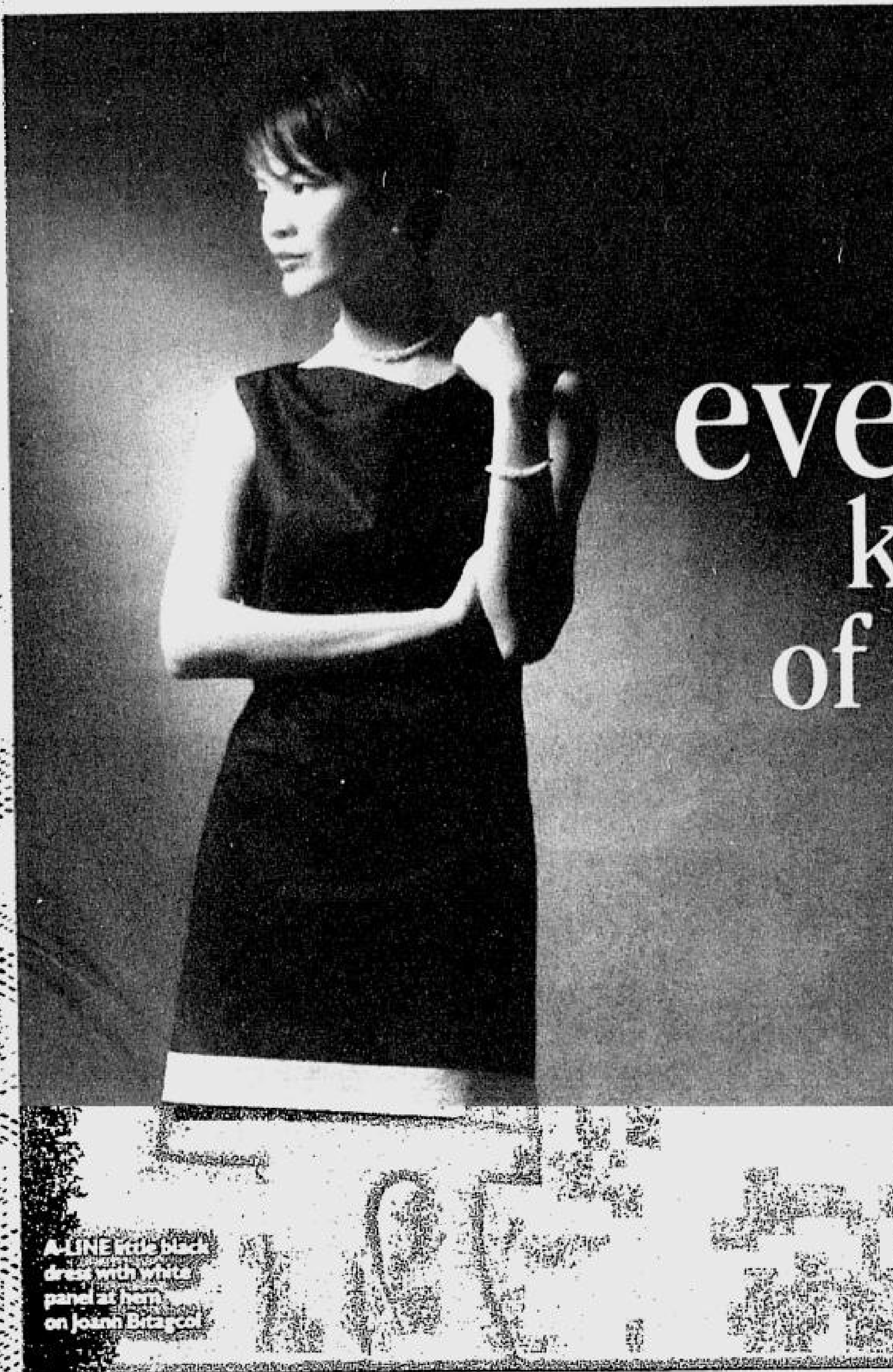


A-LINE little black dress with white panel at hem on Joann Bitagcol

SINGLE-BREASTED stretch long blazer in beige on Astrud Crisologo

For every kind of woman

A NEW clothing line that addresses the needs of different body types is ForMe. It's a brand that tries to enhance women's assets and hide their flaws.

Zorayda Ruth Andam, Binibining Pilipinas-Universe 2001 and ForMe image model, represents women who are triangle-figured because they have narrow shoulders and heavy bottoms.

Model Joann Bitagcol represents the "rectangular women"—women who have lean and lanky figures.

"ForMe's idea is to enhance your good features and free of worrying about imperfections," Bitagcol said. "I've been applying the same formula to my modeling and photography. And it works!"

Astrid Crisologo, an artist, flamenco enthusiast and ForMe endorser, said the brand has an extensive line.

"ForMe can go from preppy to corporate to daring," Crisologo said. "It focuses on women who not only have different body types but different lifestyles as well."

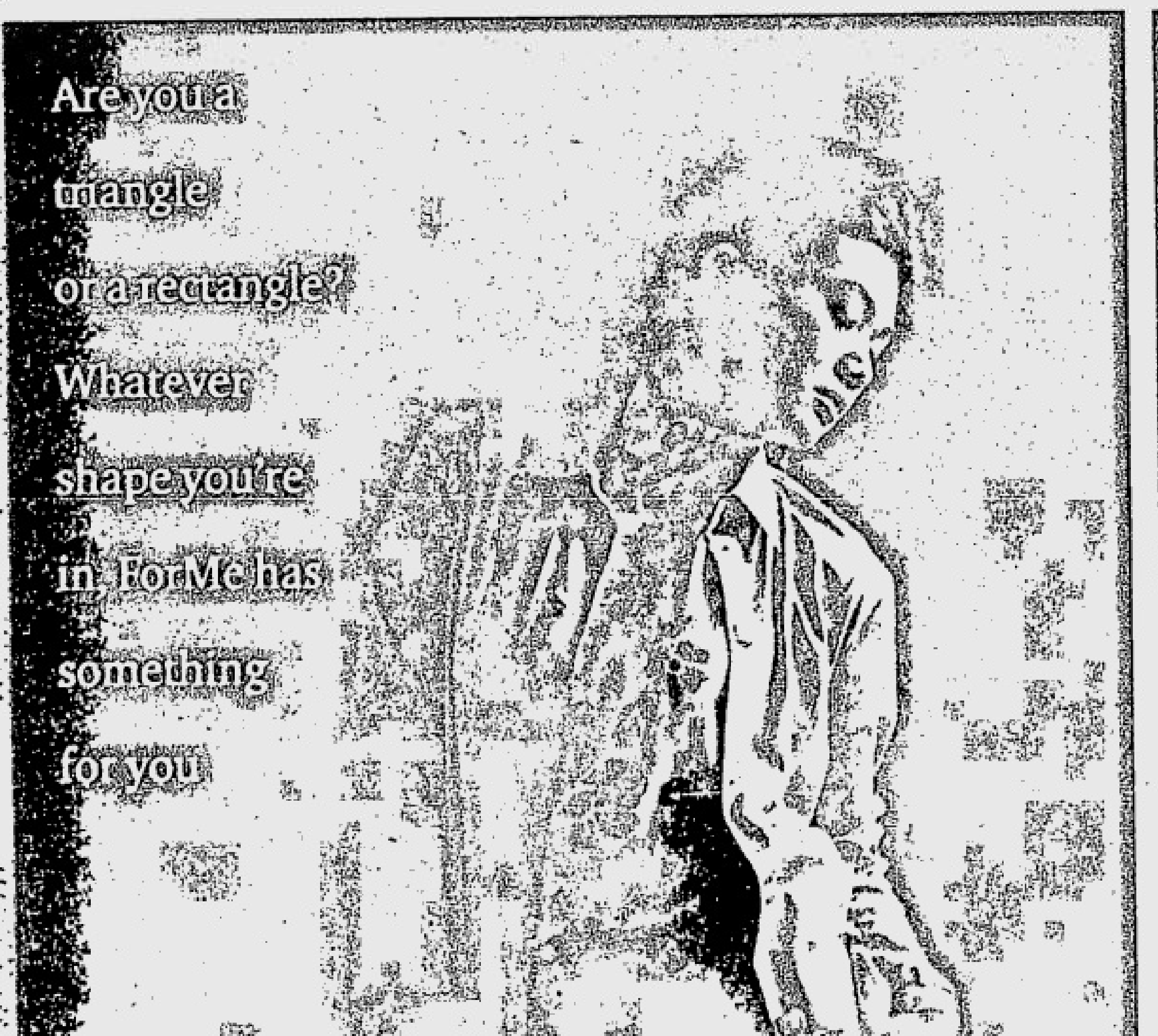
Maike Evers, a commercial model and a magazine columnist, also praised the variety of styles of ForMe.

Like a true fashion chameleon, Maike mixes and matches clothes. She said ForMe allowed her to experiment.

"ForMe has comfortable clothes with some classic designs that can be mixed and matched easily with what you already have," she said.

The brand's product tags have practical tips on what styles, cuts, patterns and details work well for you.

ForMe has shops at SM Megamall, SM North Edsa, SM Pampanga, SM Southmall, Robinson's Galleria, Festival Mall and Market! Market!



Are you a triangle or a rectangle? Whatever shape you're in, ForMe has something for you

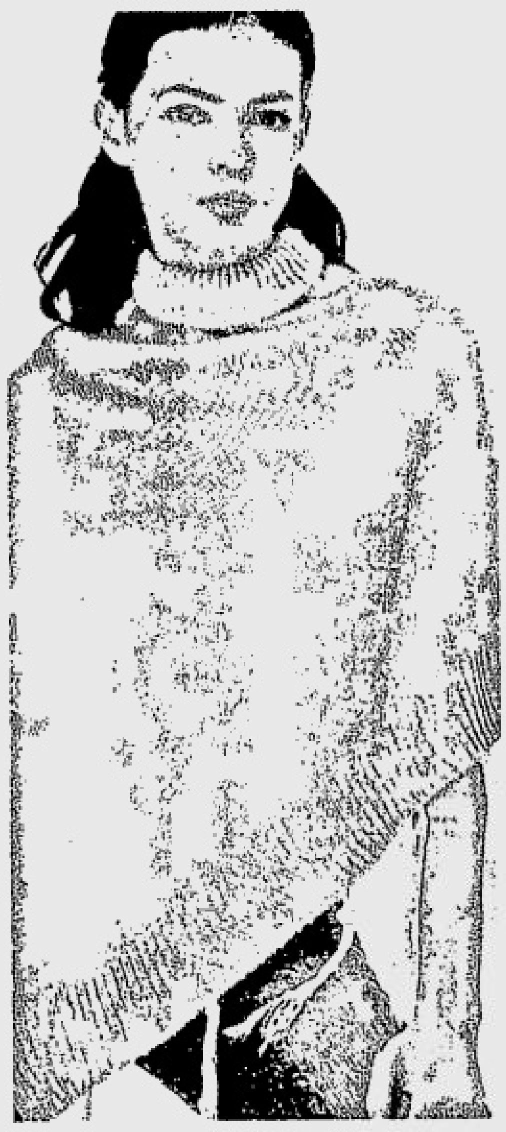
LONG jacket over printed chiffon tunic and boot-cut denims on Zorayda Ruth Andam

A-LINE khaki dress with asymmetric placket

3/4-sleeved top with assymetric neckline and boot-cut pants

TUBE little black dress with satin sash on Maike Evers

Poncho perfection



PONCHO POWER. Green turtleneck poncho with ribbed neck and hemline and fringe accents worn with denim jeans

WHEN some of the world's most powerful leaders—US President George W. Bush among them—wore ponchos in their group shot for the recent Apec conference in Santiago, Chile, it was a defining moment for this fashion item.

Ponchos have certainly gone a long way from its beginnings as indigenous Andean clothing, to the 1860s when women first began wearing these pieces as a three-quarter length cloak with buttons from the neck to hem to its first fashion outing in the '70s.

Today, it is touted as the new black sweater and the new pashmina, with stylish sightings on the likes of Jessica Simpson, Michelle Branch and Alicia Silverstone.

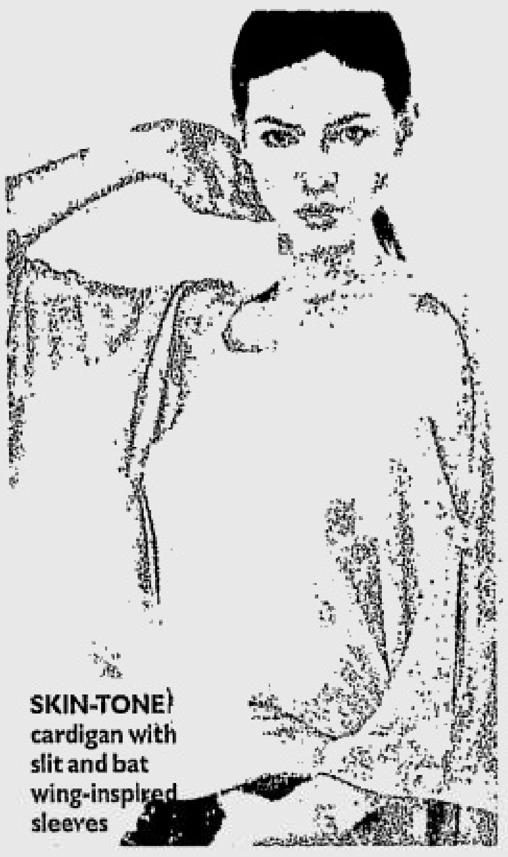
With cooler nights ahead, ponchos are also the big fashion news at SM.

"Women got tired of everything being so body-conscious and bare," says David Wolfe, creative director of the Doneger Group, a consulting firm that advises retailers on fashion trends. "The poncho hides a multitude of sins."

Poncho panache comes in V-neck or turtleneck styles, ribbed and fringed detailing, crochet tops with batwing sleeves—all in a playful melange of colors.

A great way to wrap up dresses, jeans and miniskirts, the poncho collection is available at the Boutique Square Department of all SM stores.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ERWIN BARLETA



SKIN-TONED cardigan with slit and bat wing-inspired sleeves

BROWN tailored blazer, purple printed spaghetti-strap blouse, chocolate-brown braided belt with round buckle, chocolate-brown two-way clutch/shoulder bag

To the office and beyond

DOROTHY Perkins creates fashion that functions—clothes that complement a busy woman's lifestyle and are suitable for whatever her schedule demands.

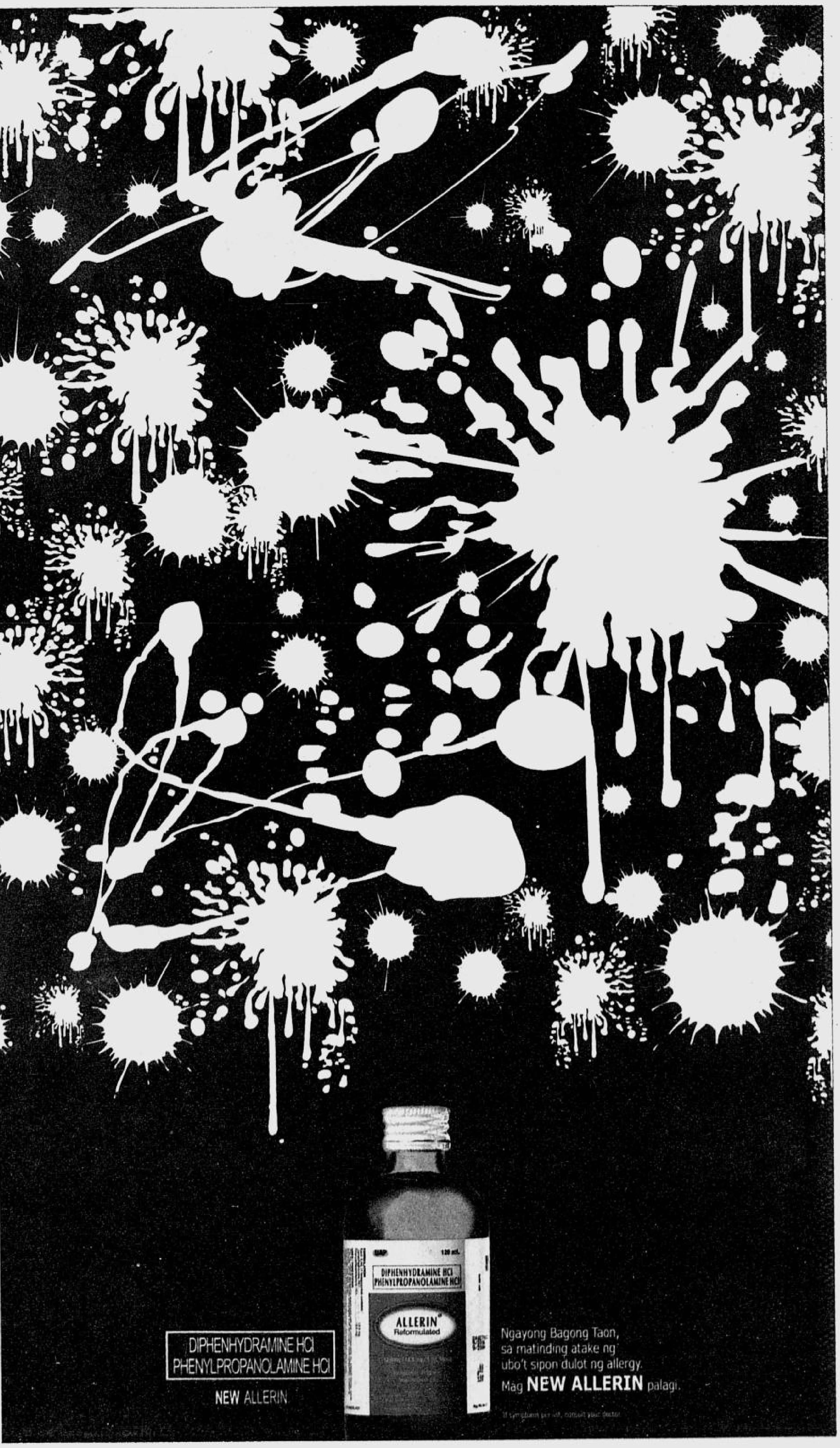
One of the biggest women's fashion houses in the United Kingdom, Dorothy Perkins has over 570 stores in Great Britain and 45 outlets in other countries.

The label carries the latest styles as well as the classics from basic essentials to the season's must-haves in various designs, colors and sizes. Its rich collection includes blouses, knitwear, jackets, coats, denim pants and trousers, suits, skirts, dresses, chic accessories and innerwear.

An all-season denim skirt, striped trouser in bootleg designs paired, soft layered tops, tweed jackets or blazers and skirts, cotton shirts, and pastel cardigans are just some of the items designed for wear from the office to an evening function.

In the Philippines, the Dorothy Perkins store has a store at the 2/L of Robinsons Galleria in Ortigas, the result of a partnership between Robinsons Specialty Stores Inc. (RSSI), the exclusive franchise holder of the brand in the Philippines, and the UK's Arcadia Group.

PURPLE ring halter top, black long-sleeved beaded cardigan, mini denim skirt, purple glittery scarf



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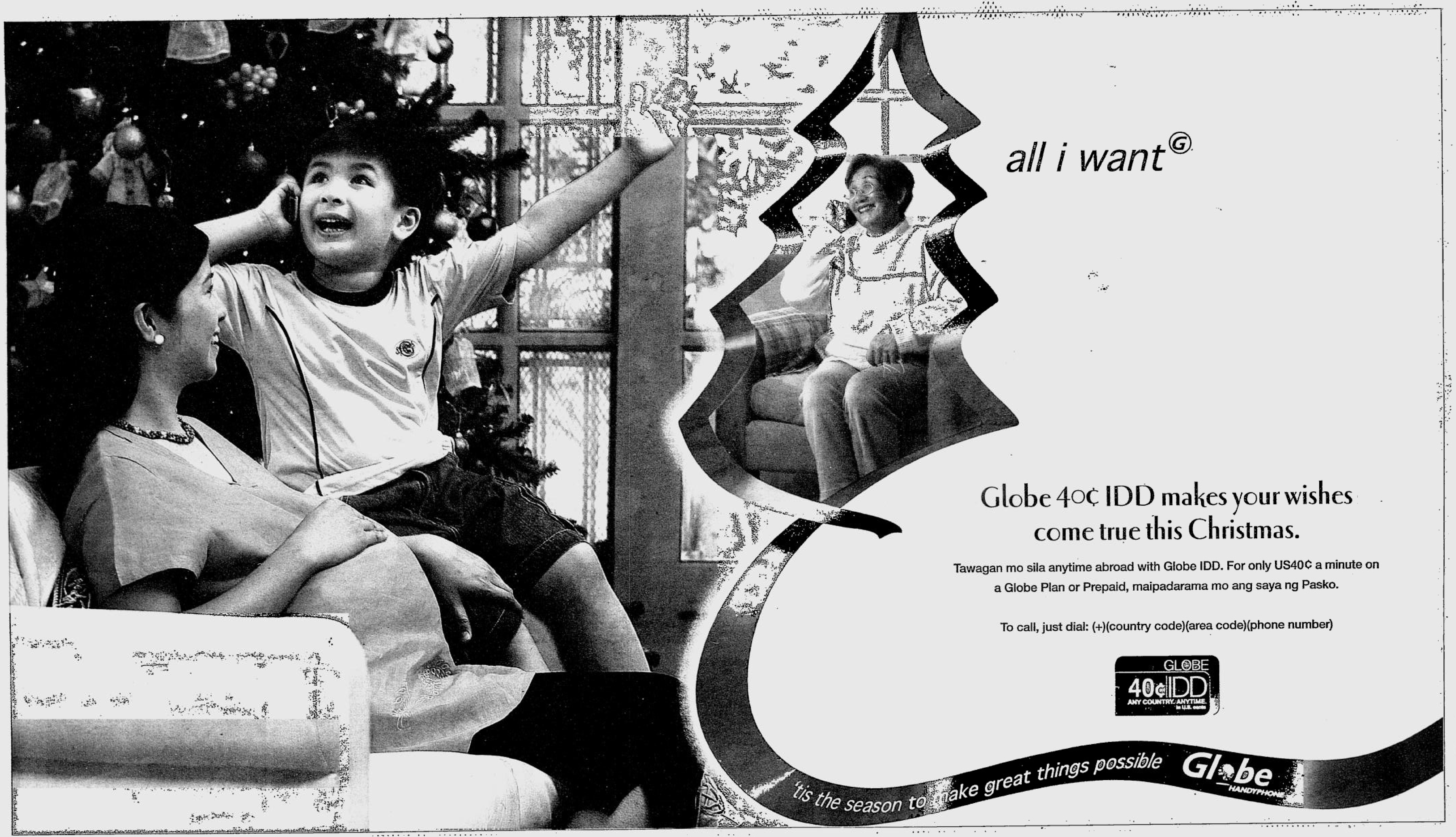
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Islander

Singaporean trend-setter now in Manila

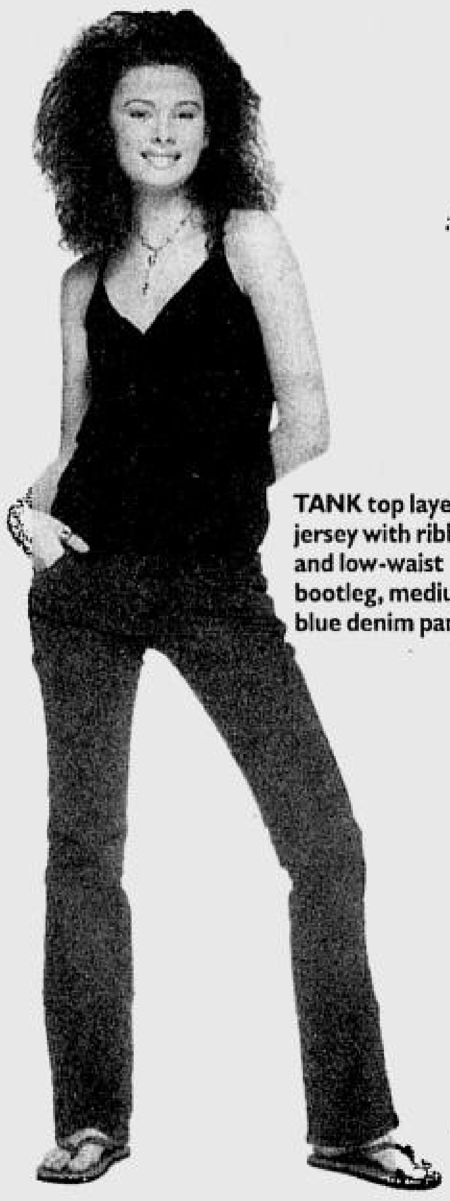
POLYESTER georgette mini pink dress

IN FASHION, as in everything else in life, there's yin and there's yang. Cinderella has introduced in the Philippines the trendy and dynamic brand Yin & Yang, one of Singapore's most prominent clothing brands.

A brain child of Crosstitch Apparel Pte. Ltd., Yin & Yang was conceived in 1997. The collection offers a wide range of ensembles to fit different personalities and moods. A woman can be sweet and nice in softly layered and fringed pieces or project a more fun and funky personality that exudes sexy confidence in Yin & Yang colors that are bright, rich and definitely eye-catching.

The line also has clothes suitable for all kinds of occasion—parties, small get-togethers or big events.

Yin & Yang ensembles are available at any Cinderella store.



TANK top layered jersey with ribbon and low-waist bootleg, medium-blue denim pants

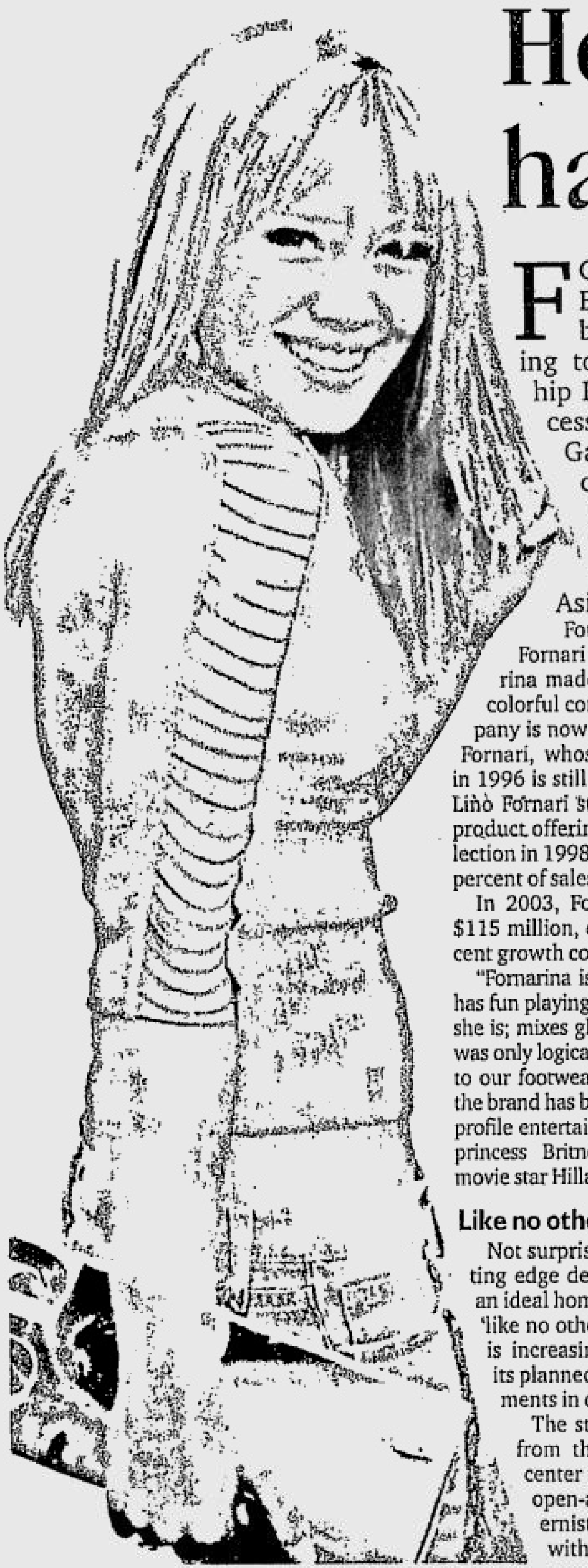
TANK top layered jersey with ribbon and plain black jersey long skirt

Hindi laruan ang paputok.
GLOBE GIZMO PREPAID
DISCOVER CONNECT PLAY

NELLY Furtado

MARY Kate and Ashley Olsen

Hollywood's fave fashion brand has found gateway in Asia



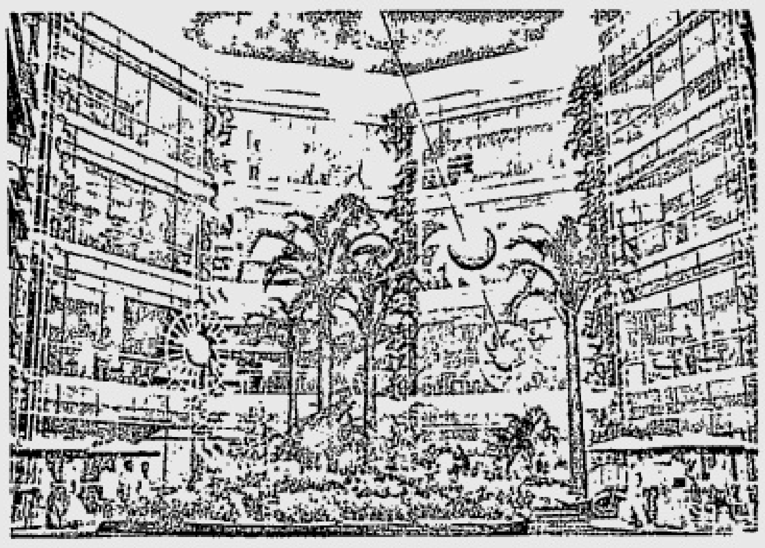
HILLARY Duff

FORNARINA, long one of Europe's top fashion brands, is finally coming to the Philippines. The hip Italian clothing and accessories firm has chosen Gateway, soon to be the country's shopping and entertainment landmark destination, as the site to launch its Asian invasion.

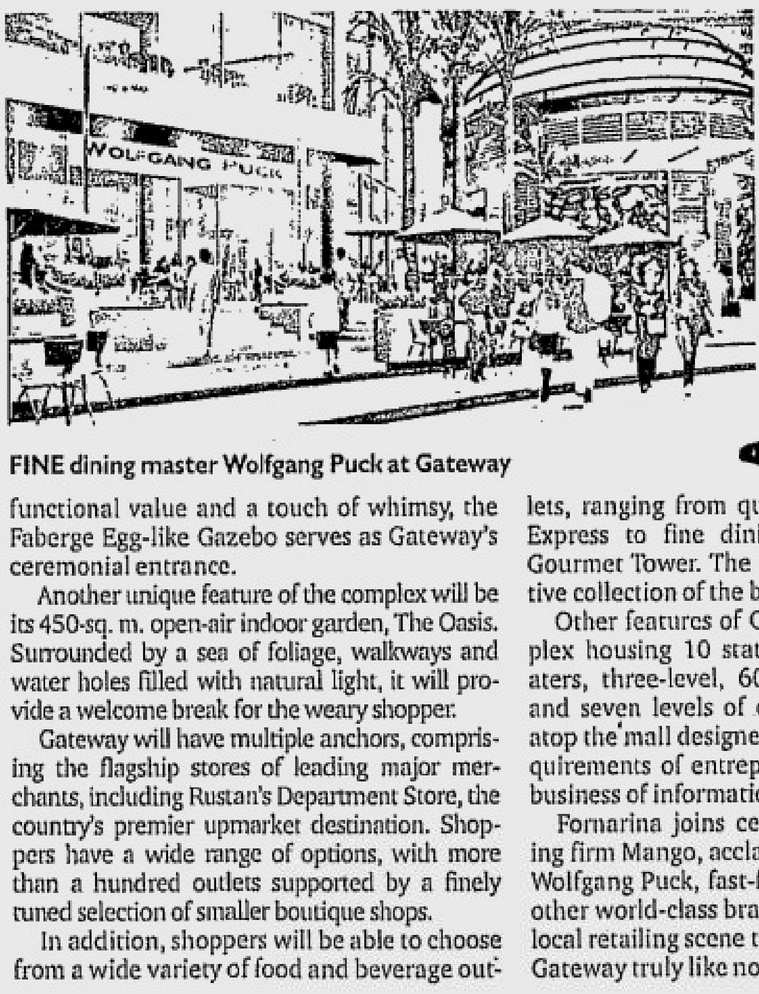
Founded in 1947 by Gianfranco Fornari as a footwear company, Fornarina made its mark in the '80s with its colorful cork wedges and clogs. The company is now led by the founder's son, Lino Fornari, whose feminine sneaker launched in 1996 is still one of the brand's bestsellers. Lino Fornari started diversifying the brand's product offering, introducing an apparel collection in 1998 that last year accounted for 60 percent of sales.

In 2003, Fornari S.P.A. reported sales of $115 million, or 91 million euros, an 18 percent growth compared with 2002.

"Fornarina is about lifestyle: A woman who has fun playing, feels and dresses younger than she is; mixes glamour, femininity and sports. It was only logical to add clothing and accessories to our footwear offering," said Fornari. Today, the brand has become a favorite of several high-profile entertainment personalities such as pop princess Britney Spears and budding teen movie star Hillary Duff.



GATEWAY'S The Oasis, the 450-sq.-m. open air garden



FINE dining master Wolfgang Puck at Gateway

Like no other

Not surprisingly, the very unique and cutting edge designs of Fornarina have found an ideal home at Gateway—touted as being 'like no other mall in the world'—one that is increasingly garnering recognition for its planned shopping facilities and experiments in design.

The structure of Gateway will break from the age-old tenets of shopping center designs with a combination of open-air and enclosed areas, modernist architecture, and tapestries with unique textures and motifs. An excellent example is the Gazebo. Combining artistic excellence with functional value and a touch of whimsy, the Faberge Egg-like Gazebo serves as Gateway's ceremonial entrance.

Another unique feature of the complex will be its 450-sq. m. open-air indoor garden, The Oasis. Surrounded by a sea of foliage, walkways and water holes filled with natural light, it will provide a welcome break for the weary shopper.

Gateway will have multiple anchors, comprising the flagship stores of leading major merchants, including Rustan's Department Store, the country's premier upmarket destination. Shoppers have a wide range of options, with more than a hundred outlets supported by a finely tuned selection of smaller boutique shops.

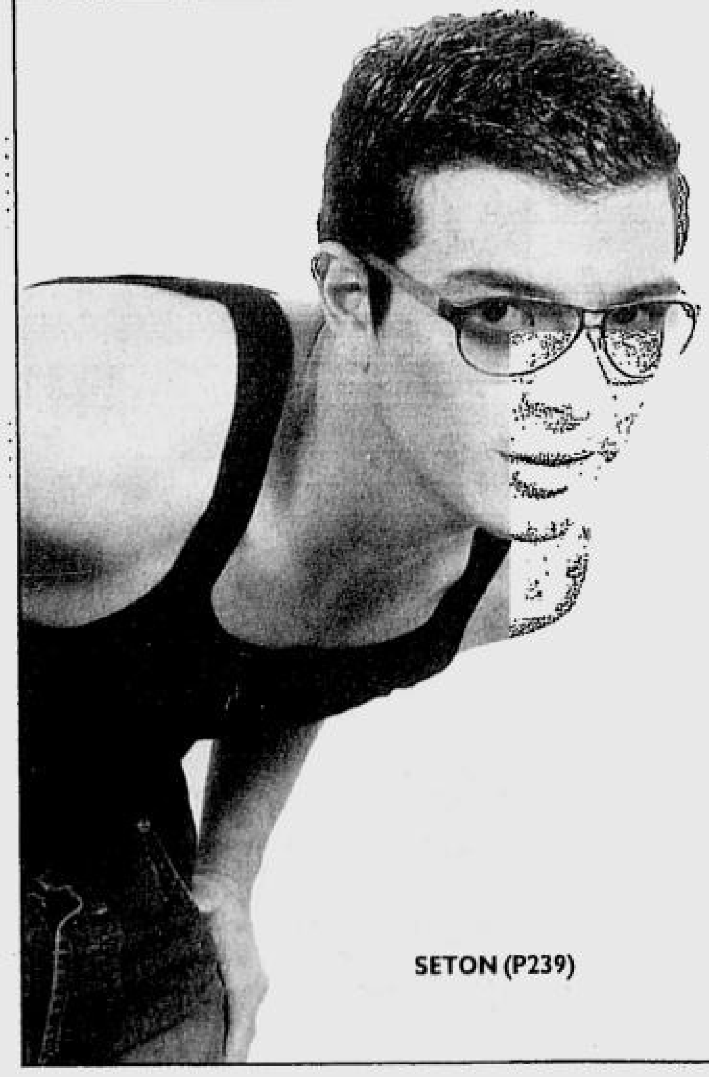
In addition, shoppers will be able to choose from a wide variety of food and beverage outlets, ranging from quick snacks at the Food Express to fine dining restaurants at the Gourmet Tower. The result is the best definitive collection of the biggest and the best!

Other features of Gateway include a Cineplex housing 10 state-of-the-art movie theaters, three-level, 600-car covered parking and seven levels of cyber offices integrated atop the mall designed to meet the unique requirements of entrepreneurs engaged in the business of information technology.

Fornarina joins celebrated Spanish clothing firm Mango, acclaimed fine dining master Wolfgang Puck, fast-food giant Taco Bell and other world-class brands yet to be seen in the local retailing scene to make Araneta Center's Gateway truly like no other mall in the world.

BRITNEY Spears

Behind eyewear brand's sleek ads



SETON (P239)

THE CONCEPT behind the i2i billboards was provided by i2i New York, which sells affordable and stylish eyewear. But the strong, sleek and sexy images of Piolo Pascual and Jericho Rosales were captured by Marlon Despues, an art photographer.

Despues studied architecture and photography at the University of California in Berkeley.

For the shoot, Studio 546's Eric Maningat did the hair and make-up.

The campaign aims to promote eyewear as a stylish accessory in today's active lifestyle.

TOLEDO (P219)

SARBETH (P239)

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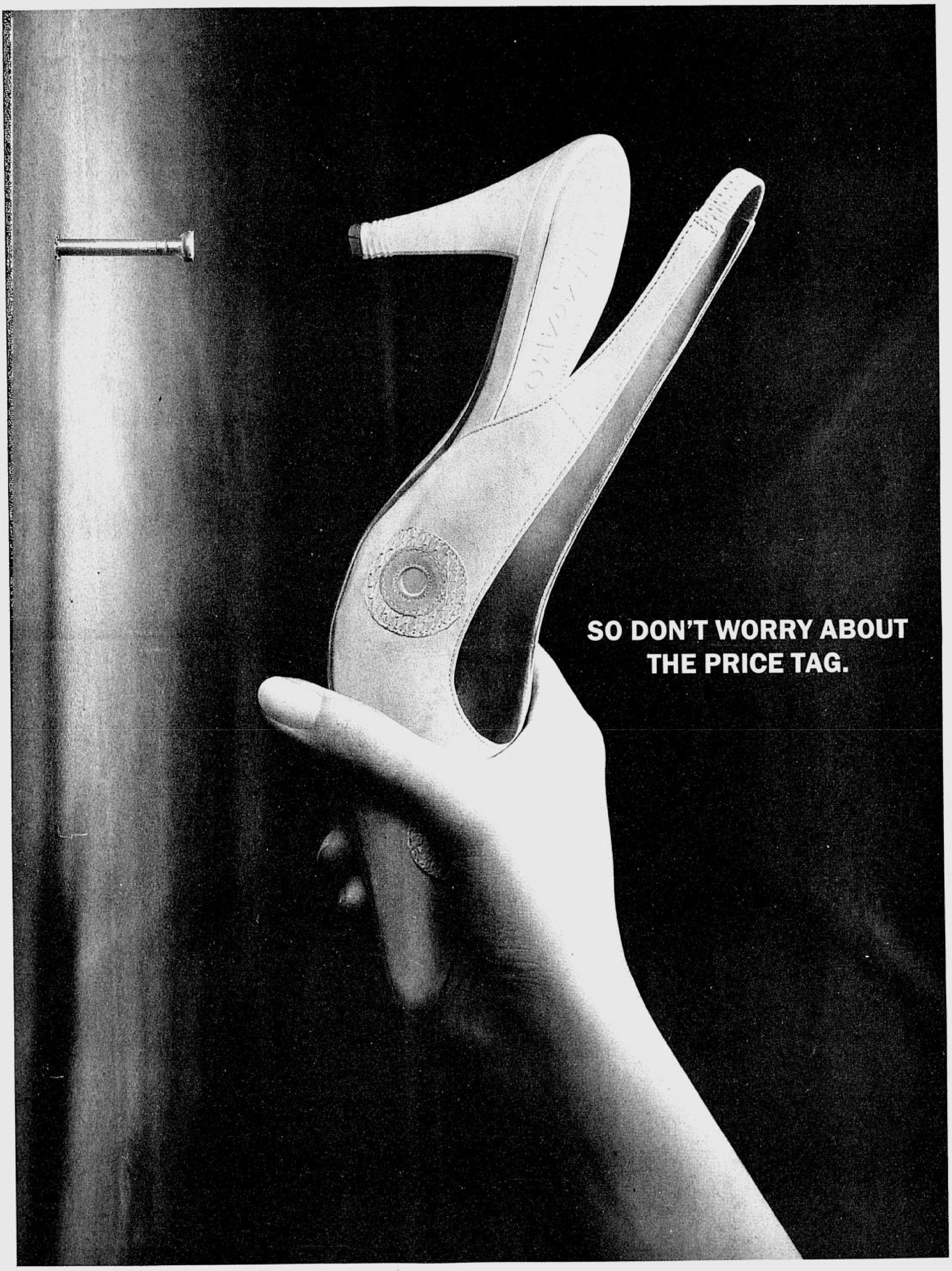

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3. Text VISA followed by your name on card,issuing bank,last 4 digits of account number,amount of transaction,date of transaction,time of transaction on transaction slip (No space after each comma. Amounts ₱1000 and up should be written without a comma or a peso sign). Send to **2989** for Smart and Globe. **Ex: VISA MENNIE SO,AIG,1234,1000.25,102404,1808**

Bi-monthly draws start on November 11, 2004.

*Purchases from January 1, 2004 to one day before a draw date or until December 31, 2004, whichever comes first. You can win a maximum of ₱500,000 net of withholding tax. October 24, 2004 to January 23, 2005. See posters for details. Per DTI NCR Permit No. [illegible], Series of 2004.

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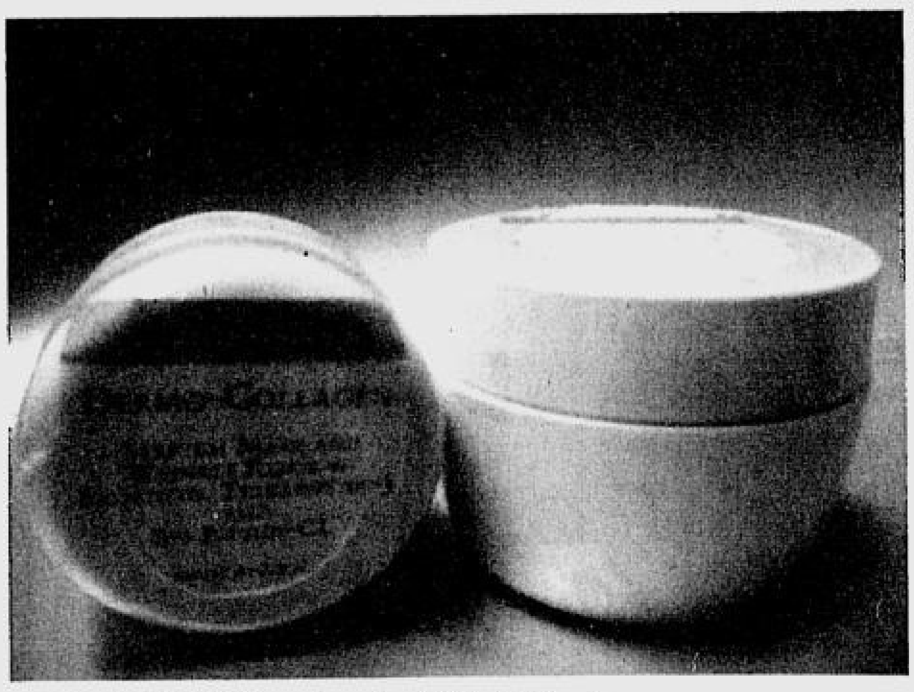
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Restoring the Christmas stressed-out skin

MAKEOVER 911

Kinny Salas

THE ENDLESS round of Christmas shopping, late-night parties, food bingeing and dawn Masses might have taken its toll on our skin.

Beauty editors compare notes on what creams work best. I am fully aware that not everyone has the same skin type as mine so I will try to address everyone's problems.

Oily/acne-prone but dehydrated skin

Yes, oily skin can be dehydrated. How else does one explain the morning after an alcohol binge when one has pimples all over, when one's skin is shiny but feels tight and uncomfortable?

The best products for such skin are Lancôme's Aqua Fusion Gel crème, Chanel Hydramax serum and moisture boost fluid, L'Occitane Lavender face gel, Shiseido Pureness mattifying moisturizer, L'Oreal's Hydrafresh gel moisturizer, The Body Shop Tea Tree Mattifying gel and Clinique Repairwear.

Well-hydrated oily skin can fade pimple marks faster, make skin feel smooth without being greasy.

Sagging, dehydrated and wrinkled

Firming creams have gone a long way from its first-generation ancestors. Rice extracts are the main ingredients in Dermalogica's Power Rich cream (P8,900 for five tubes). This was the dream product of Jane Wurwand and Dr. Diana Howard, founder and technology head, respectively, of Dermalogica. They created this multitasking cream that firms, hydrates, smoothens, evens out skin tone, gives the skin a glow, deals with wrinkles and exfoliates without acid irritation.

It was created in three different phases and when all three formulas were done, they were merged to create this wonder cream. Phase 1 deals with the firmness issue; Phase 2, the renewal of skin via non-aggressive and irritating exfoliation; and Phase 3 is focused on skin regeneration. Protein peptides and vitamins are used to improve skin texture and reverse the signs of aging.

Awake's Firm Advantage rice cream (P9,000) was 12 years in the making. This luxurious anti-aging cream also firms up skin while maintaining the skin's condition at its optimum level.

Shu Uemura's Beta G has a night cream, which has a non-greasy formula.

Carita's Perfect Skin (P18,000) fights sagging skin and smoothes fine lines even around the eyes. It needs no serum and eye cream, just a cleanser and a toner.

Remember all the rage about Strivectin? That stretchmark cream that was discovered to firm skin and smooth wrinkles? My contact in Jeunesse Manila (tel. 6888062) has presented me with two cheaper alternatives that contain the same active ingredients, Biopeptide-CL (for collagen synthesis) and Palmitoyl Tretrapeptide (anti-inflammatory and reverses environmental skin damage).

Strivectin fans need no longer wait for a relative to come home from the US. They need no longer order from the Internet and pay all the extra charges. One good thing about Dermo-Collagen and DermaPrin is they are non-oily, so they're perfect for our weather. Both DC and DP has fast absorbing non-oily formulas. They are professional-strength wrinkle and stretchmark creams backed by clinical studies that show they can effectively reduce the length and depth of wrinkles. They also improve skin texture, diminishes freckles and brown spots, and checks blotchy, uneven-colored skin.

Tired, dull skin

All skin types can suffer from this and I have found products to restore the skin's radiance and smoothness.

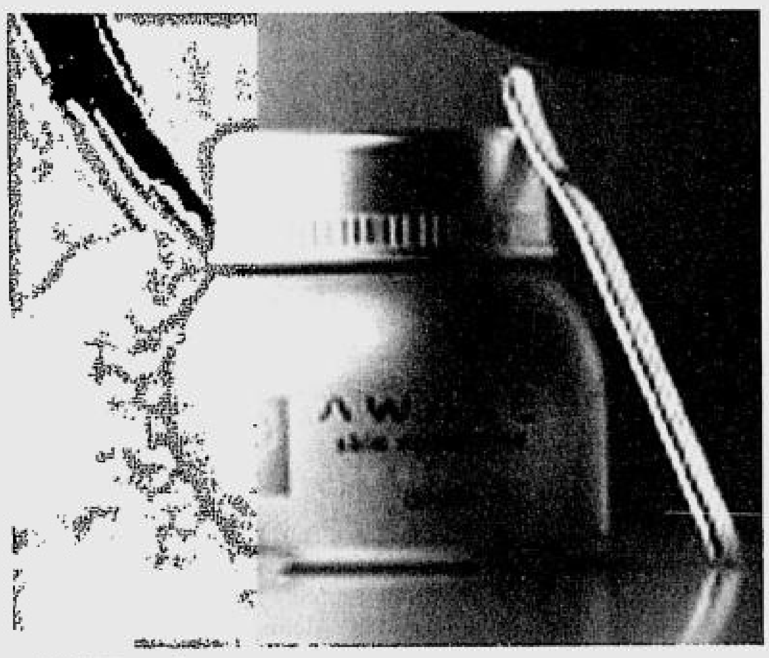
Murad's Vitalic skincare range cuts six important steps into three. Its active ingredient is Pomengranate, which Dr. Murad himself discovered; it's the ultimate brightening ingredient to lighten and even out skin tone. It boosts your SPF's power by at least 50 percent more.

Step 1 is for cleansing and toning, Step 2 treats and repairs skin damage, and Step 3 moisturizes and protects with SPF 15.

I promise you rosy cheeks as well. If you have the budget, throw in the Vitalic pills, which help brighten the skin of the entire body.

Others: Apivita Multivitamin capsules with Vitamins C, E and F; and face cream with orange, acerola and green tea, which repairs sun damage. Also, Sundari Nighttime nourishing oil and Neem night cream.

E-mail the author at kinnysalas@yahoo.com



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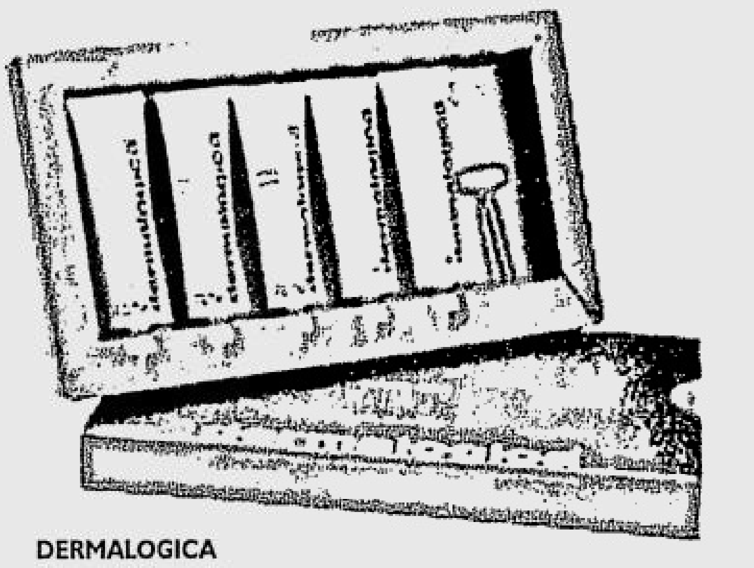
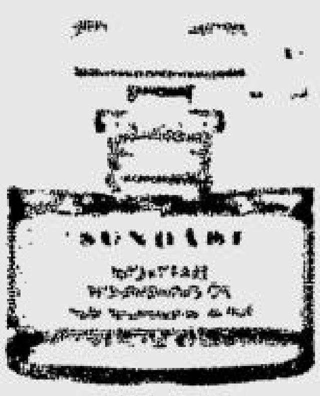

DERMALOGICA
Power Rich cream



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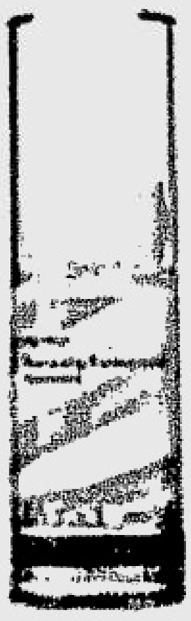
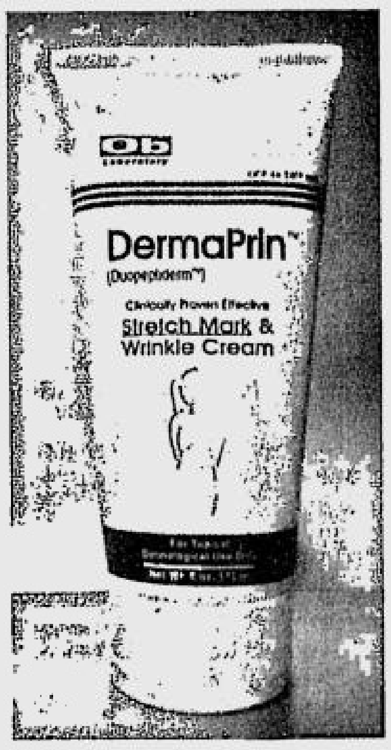

MURAD Energising Pomengranate treatment



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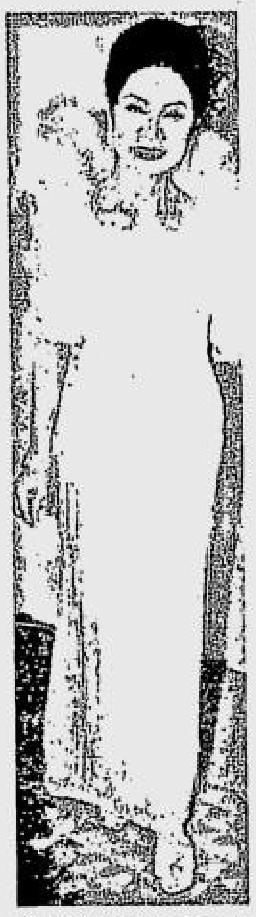
PORTUGUESE Ambassador Joao Caetano da Silva, Unifem's Olga Severino Martel, Ulrike da Silva and Don Jose Martel

FCCP's Carrie Bautista and philanthropist and woman of mega substance, Chito Madrigal

WOMEN of substance behind the smashing success of FCCP: Honorary Consul of Monaco, Fortune Ledesma, with two of Cosmo Manille's hostesses with the mostest, Honorary Consul of Guatemala Mellie Ablaza in a Ben Farrales gown, and Nene Leonor

CRISELDA Lontok, Chit Dee, Fe Rodriguez and Brenda Reyes

KAREN Macasaet


MELDY Cojuangco in an ultra glam terno by Pitoy Moreno

PERSONAS for all seasons. Art connoisseur and top architect Gerry Contreras, well-respected couple Mely and Paeng Hechanova, and top emcee Johnny Litton

SOL Tan-Gatue

What a ball! What a bash for resto great!

WITHOUT BATTING AN EYELASH

Maurice Arcache

Photos by Alex Van Hagen on Kodak Max

AS IN the past, one of my must-go-to happenings, *palanggas*, is the annual Grand Ball, organized by those workaholic gals of the Friends for Cultural Concerns of the Philippines (FCCP). It's an affair that FCCP members and their chi-chi pals look forward to. The ball seeks to raise funds to support the projects of the FCCP.

This year the Grand Ball was held at the Main Hall of the Makati Shangri-La. The place was buzzing with society hotshots and name-droppables socializing while they sipped champagne.

The décor, which was conceptualized and executed by **Junjun Ablaza**, no less, was silvery, to commemorate FCCP's silver anniversary, *natch*.

Après the excellent dinner prepared by Shangri-La's super talented chef **Thomas Figovz**, the program began with the stately rigodon de honor, participated in by past FCCP presidents and the members of the incumbent board. The ladies were at their elegant-best, dressed in eye-catching ternos, while the men were dashing in their black-tie get-up. Most of them are busy professionals and businessmen, but what was super-commendable was they took time out of their busy schedule to come for the twice-a-week rehearsals. I really never found out if they did that on their own free will or they were dragged by their wives.

Anyway, they also did two other dance numbers, "Noon at Ngayon," each a medley of rhumba, tango, mambo, cha-cha and samba.

Then there were also two other dance numbers, choreographed by **Bujing Danao**, who said that at times he had felt like shooting some of the dancing socialites because of sheer exasperation, dahlings.

FCCP appreciates the efforts made by two of the country's mega-socialites and philanthropists, **Chito Madrigal Collantes**, FCCP chair emeritus, and **Imelda Ongsiako Cojuangco**, a major donor of the ball. The latter looked absolutely glamorous in her white terno by **Pitoy Moreno**. *Naturellement*, her gown had white ostrich feathers.

Moi was out of there by 11 p.m. because I had to dash to Nuvo, but **Nene Leonor** told me the following day that the dancing went on way past Cinderella's hour, with music by **Nonoy Lopez**.

The 2004 Ball was a huge success, thanks to the tireless efforts of **Fortune Ledesma**, ways and means director, who was superbly assisted by **Nene Leonor** and **Carrie Bautista**. Under the leadership of FCCP president, the ultra-glam **Mellie Ablaza**, the ball was a great event.

Plaza founder feted

The super popular Plaza Resto, when not cooking up superb dining specials, is catering a wedding reception or a company anniversary.

But things were a little different during one big day a year, *palanggas*. The Plaza at the penthouse of the Philippine Stock Exchange East Tower in Ortigas Center threw a fun theme bash for no ordinary honoree.

It was the 82nd birthday of Don Jose Reyes, no less the co-founder (with his wife, the late **Meldy Albano**) and the force behind The Plaza, one of the country's most famous restaurants.

A full production, complete with actors (family members only, *natch*!), props, costumes, and musical scoring, was put together by the Reyes children.

Joe's eldest daughter, our pal Millie, organized the whole event. Renowned stage director **Bart Guingona** orchestrated the colorful program, turning back the clock a few thousand years and brought to life the days of the Roman empire.

One scene, for instance, presented the violent confrontation between Marc Anthony (Raymund Reyes) and Octavius (Mikee Reyes) over the beautiful and legendary Cleopatra.

A short video, "The Grand Old Man of The Plaza," showed a sentimental trip down memory lane, recalling the early years of Joe and his late wife Meldy, and their travels around the world.

Après that, as if on cue, the lights dimmed, pulsating Middle Eastern music filled the ballroom, and before you could bat an eyelash, *palanggas*, a "decoy" belly dancer was slithering down the aisle, and as the dancer exited, the Reyes gals **Millie, Marijo** and **Dorcie** with Joe's granddaughters **Karla, Twinkle, Happy** and **Bea**, in full belly-dance outfits, came out gyrating and bumping, to the utter surprise and amusement of the guests,

In the audience were Drs. Greg and Gina Pastorfide, socialite **Ching Cruz, Thelma Gana, Agnes Huibonhoa** and **Fortune Ledesma**.

Joe Reyes has been widely hailed as a leading light in the Philippine restaurant industry. "The Hotel and Restaurant Association of the Philippines only recently honored him as co-founder of the country's largest and most prestigious trade organization," Millie told *moi* about her dad.

Yes, *palanggas*, to this day, this grand pillar of the restaurant industry has continued to dazzle people with The Plaza's culinary fare.

To all of you my *palanggas*, a happy, happy new year. May the new year make all your wishes come true. Have a blast!

DIPLOMATIC SET. Consul Anne Coleman, Mexican Ambassador Enrique Hubbard and his wife, Mariana

ANNA Sobrepeña, former model and governor Emily Lopez and Yrna Ileto

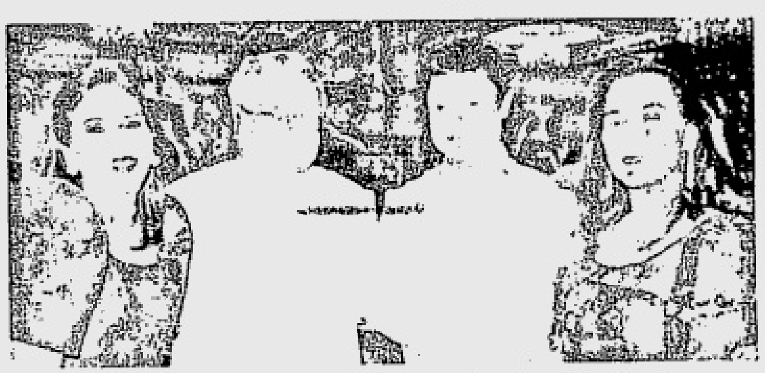
GORGEOUS beauties. Super pals Agnes Huibonhoa and Ching Cruz

CELEBRATOR'S grandchildren. Twinkle Feraren, Bea Guingona and Happy Feraren

ALL in the famille. Benjie and Dorcie Guingona, with Bart Guingona

MMDA chair Bayani Fernando

MARC Anthony has arrived. Celebrator's son, Raymund Reyes


CHIT Gohu with future Ambassador Tonet Lagdameo, popular Southern gent Jose Mari Trenas, and brilliant working heiress, Marivic Vasquez in a stunning Patis Tesoro terno

BABY Antonio, Tess Castro, Annabelle Adriano, Charrie Lim and Erlie Gamboa

BEN Guingona, Teofisto Guingona, celebrator Joe Reyes, Henry Sy and Tony Meer

WILLY and Maureen Soong, Joe and Millie Reyes, with Karla Marina

Royal visitor for British school

THE DUKE of York visited again the British School Manila when he was in Manila recently. Prince Andrew had visited the school in 2001 when it was still being constructed. Chris Mantz, head of school; Glenn Hardy, head of primary school; and Stacy Rodriguez, the head student, showed the prince around. The duke chatted with the primary school students before touring the senior school accompanied by its head, Ian Clayton.

The Duke of York presented the GCSE certificates to year 12 students, whose accomplishments would have put the school in the top 250 in the United Kingdom.

GOINGS ON

PARTY. Today, the corner of Paseo de Roxas and Ayala Avenue will be transformed into a Carnival of Lights as the venue of the New Year's Eve countdown party hosted by Makati Mayor Jejomar Binay. Starting at 5 p.m., the party will feature rock and pop bands.

REUNION. Mapua High School batch 1982 will have a reunion on Jan. 2, 2005 starting 4 p.m. at MIT High School building on Doroteo Jose Street, Sta. Cruz, Manila. There will be a dinner buffet and raffle. Call 0917-5208313/ 8172653.

SEMINAR. Corban Tutorial Center will hold Easy English seminars on Jan. 8, 9, 15 and 16, 2-5 p.m. The seminars will tackle conversation, grammar and writing. Call 8426665/ 8093050. Corban is located at the G/F MB Aguirre Bldg., President's Ave. cor. Elizalde St., BF Parañaque.

COURSE. The Philippine Italian Association holds a 40-hour Italian language course beginning Jan. 11, 2005, 2-4 p.m. Venue is at PIA secretariat, 2/F Zeta Bldg., Salcedo St., Legaspi Village, Makati. Call 8151310. Enrollment is ongoing.

REUNION. The Centro Escolar University Alumni Foundation Inc. is holding Good Old CEU: A Centennial Celebration Countdown on Jan. 29, 2005, 2 p.m., at CEU, Mendiola St., Manila. Call 7356861 to 71.

CONTEST. Miriam College Center for Applied Music launches the 2005 Competition for Young Artists. Application forms are available from the Music Center on Katipunan Road, Loyola Heights, Quezon City. Call 4261822. Deadline for submission of entries is Jan. 31, 2005.

EXPO. The 12th TravelTour Expo will be held Feb. 4, 5 and 6, 2005 at Megatrade Halls 1, 2 and 3 of SM Megamall. Call 5520026 to 29.

SEMINAR. Top local and foreign photographers will be lecturers in the seminars to be held Feb. 4-7 at the Asian Institute of Management. Call 8435341/ 8137420.

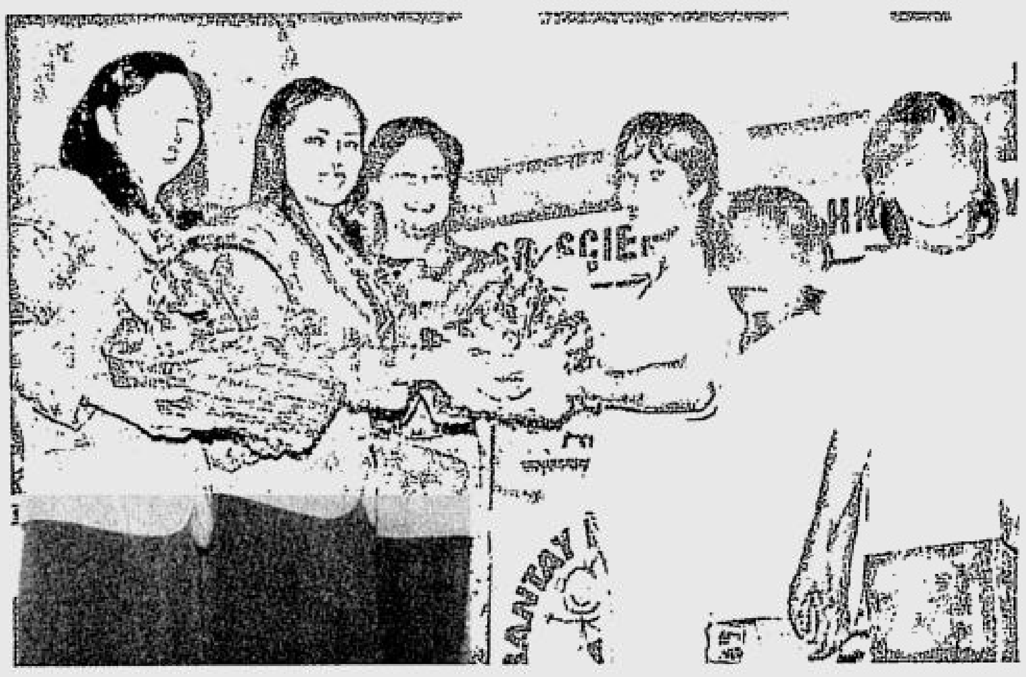
SKED CHANGE. The Tagaytay Film, Broadcast and Creative Workshops has moved its workshops for the October sembreak to May 2005. Call 9251915.

DISCOUNTS. Handyman Do It Best Home Center and Handyman Do It Center offer great discounts on Christmas buys and have a raffle promo until Dec. 31. Enjoy up to 50-percent discount on selected items and get a chance to win a Toyota Vios.

The do it-yourself (DIY) stores have items for car owners, home managers, hobbyists and everyone else. Customers can avail of an exclusive Handyman gift bag for a minimum purchase of P300. They can also get a raffle coupon for every P300 purchase (inclusive of P200 worth of any Philips Lighting products, Pylox Paints, Lakbayan Bag, Fed Seal, Aquabloc, Baron Adtel Antenna and Mess Out car shampoo) for a chance to win a brand new Toyota Vios. By using their Robinsons Card they get twice the number of coupons and double their chances of winning.

Raffle draw is Jan. 14. Visit www.handyman.com.ph.

Check out more Christmas items at "Christmas Gifts Galore" at Handyman Do It Centers in Robinsons Place Novaliches and Robinsons Place Pioneer, and all Handyman Do It Best Home Centers in all Robinsons Malls, all Waltermart Malls and selected malls nationwide.



SINGAPORE Airlines organized an early Christmas treat for its Bantay Edukasyon scholars. Photo shows, from left, Jocelyn Tupino, Bianca de Mesa and Clarissa Morelos giving Christmas baskets to the families of scholars.

ARCHITECT George Ramos, Paola de Micheli, former First Lady Imelda Marcos, gemologist-jeweler Vanafi owner Vanessa Figueroa, Jewelry designer and owner Davide Staurino, Maurita Arce and Gilda Figueroa

Fine jewelry line

JEWELRY designer and owner Davide Staurino recently flew in from Italy to grace the launching of Staurino Fratelli at the Peninsula Manila, where Vanafi, a store for fine jewelry that carries the line, has opened its fourth branch.

Models showcased pieces from the Nature, Mikado and Spaghetti collections. They also wore oversized XL watches from Staurino's new watch line.

Guest of honor was former First Lady Imelda Marcos.

Staurino and Vanessa Figueroa, the young gemologist-owner of Vanafi presented her with a butterfly brooch from the Staurino Nature collection. The brooch featured pave diamonds and colored gems.

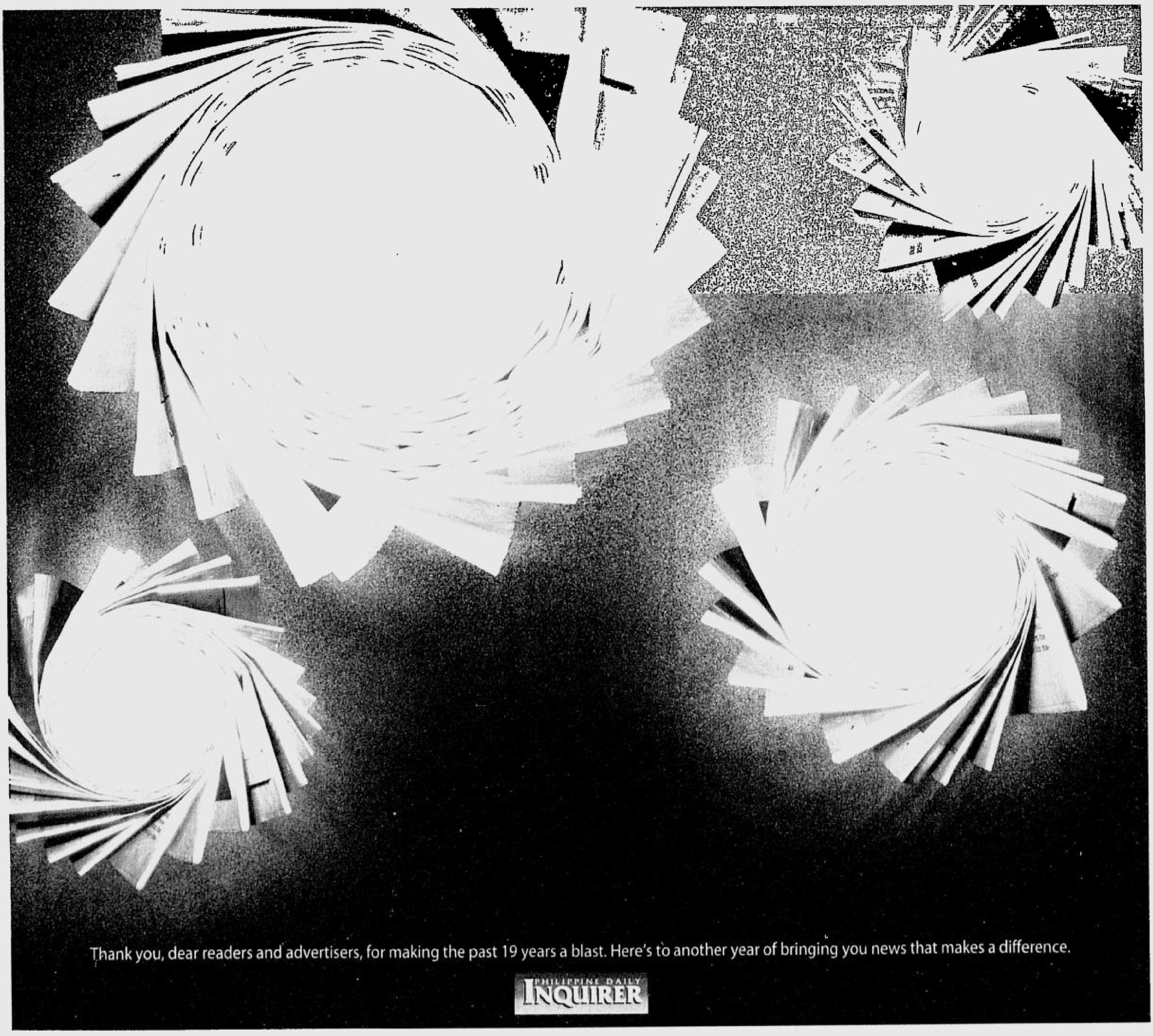
Other guests were the Ambassadors and First Secretaries from Belgium, Italy and US; and top executives from companies like Toyota Philippines, Diamond-Mitsubishi Motors, Avis Corp., DHL, San Miguel Corp., Cebu Pacific Airways, Robinson's Corp., Jollibee Foods and Bench.

Gift certificates from Vanafi, Peninsula and Leonidas Chocolates were raffled off, as were three luxurious pieces from Staurino Fratelli.

Giorgio Armani Night and Day Perfumes were awarded to the Armani Lady and Gentlemen of the evening: Lance Feliciano, son of DHL owner Rod Feliciano, and presidential daughter-in-law Angela Montenegro Arroyo.

All guests walked away with gift bags filled with Lancôme cosmetics, Leonidas Belgian chocolate and Vanafi-Staurino notepads.

Vanafi's branches are located at Glorietta 1, NAIA, Greenhills and the Peninsula. Aside from the one-of-a-kind Staurino Fratelli line, Vanafi also carries other fine jewelry brands.



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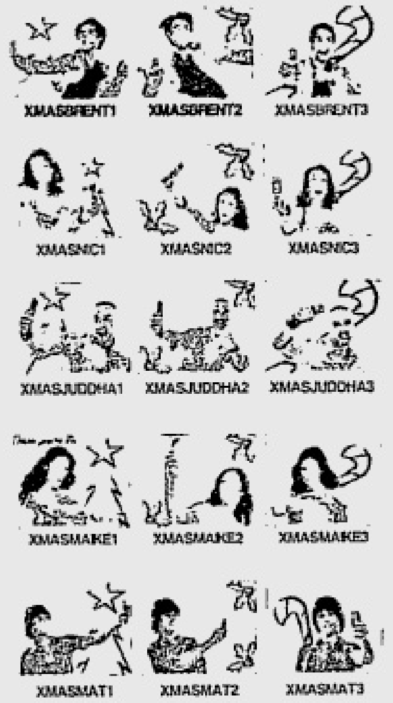
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Mwah!

By Emmie G. Velarde

SHOW TIME

POCHOLO MALILLIN would rather have a Studio 54 in his hands.

"I want people to surrender to the music as soon as they step in, while they make their way to their favorite spots inside, wait for their drinks ... and basically whenever they feel like it," he says.

He wants to witness them pull out the stops for a night of sheer fun, the way he and partner Chris Nicolas have given it pretty much all they've got to make sure sheer fun—plus music, dancing, out-of-the-usual shows, laughter—and nothing less, is what clients would find at their place.

The place is Club Mwah! in Mandaluyong City. There's no way the rather sedate façade of The Venue Tower (652 Boni Avenue) could give any hint that such a scene unfolds, like an apparition while much of the neighborhood slumbers, six nights a week.

With Mwah!'s fully computerized light and sound equipment, a multi-level stage that flows into a blinking psychedelic dance floor, crystal chandeliers and furnishings (throw in restrooms with glass sinks) that spell serious money, Chris and Pocholo need not dream up a classy club. They have one.

Except that clients have yet to reach a surrender-to-the-music state. Mostly, they come for the shows—which is not a lame idea in itself, not at all.

Chris, the creative half of the audacious duo, has put together two short but spectacular, full-costume gay revues, which make Mwah!, in the meantime, closer to a downscaled Las Vegas show hall than to the New York disco hotspot of the late '70s.

"Bedazzled" and "Japan" recall Tropicana's Les Folies Bergere, even with less than half the body count. "Folies de Mwah!" Pocholo calls his group, with much affection and pride. The dozen or so performers—girls, guys, and gays together—are lavishly outfitted.

More important, they impeccably trained for every single number, be it the requisite lip-synching or a take on a Broadway hit. Chris stars in the major skits as Vodka.

The shows are viewed from the dance floor level, or from a gallery a few carpeted steps up, at the bar and lounge area. Here, details of the stage design are best appreciated-double curtains, hydraulic-lift center platform, and playful pillars in the form of massive gold-painted arms holding up the ceiling with graceful hands.

"Just like in Caesars Palace—and those fingers are manicured, by the way," Pocholo notes with flourish.

Show time is always a high-energy point sustained for approximately 40 minutes. "Bedazzled," which goes on Fridays and Saturdays, is a series of showstoppers that climaxes with the group's stunning rendition of "Cell Block Tango," from "Chicago."

On this page are scènes from "Japan," which is staged Mondays thru Thursdays.

Chris as Mwah! president and creative director, and Pocholo as vice president and general manager tend to boast of different aspects of the club.

Chris would point to the well-appointed dressing rooms and eight rehearsal studios within the building (which they own).

"I never even stopped to consider the return of investment when I planned the shows," Chris says.

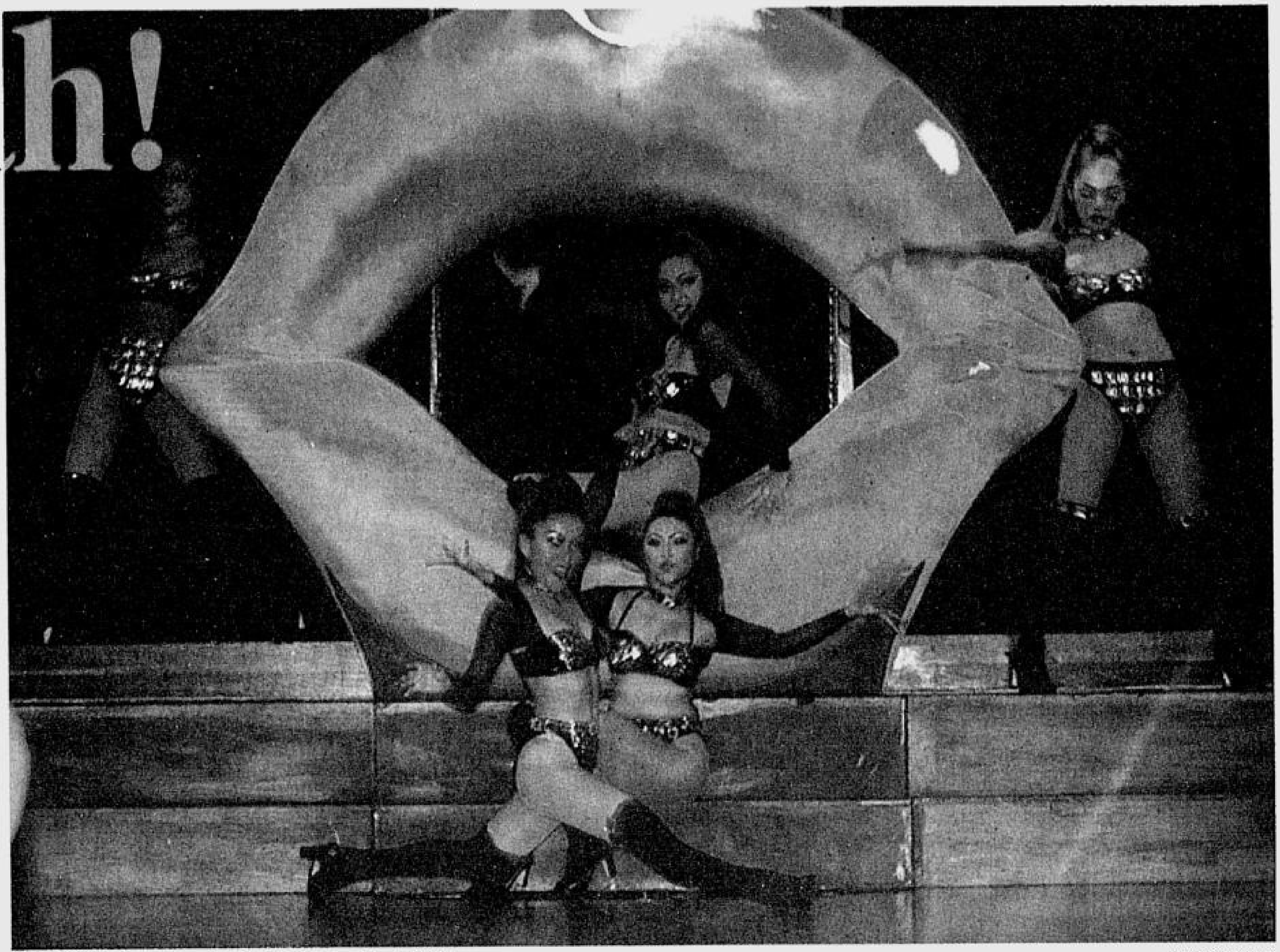
Pocholo calls attention to the well-stocked bar, designer seats, and his favorite nook, the VIP Lounge.

"Celebrity guests like it here," Pocholo says of the chic lounge with zebra-stripe couches, a faux waterfall, and a karaoke system that can play 100,000 songs, including a complete Sinatra repertoire "for those in my age group." He winks. "Although I can also do Madonna and Britney."

The cover charge of P500 could be a little steep for clubbers who may need some convincing to get out of their Malate or Makati comfort zones, but the partners are willing to wait it out, "rather than sacrifice comfort, luxury, quality of service, and entertainment."

And so Chris and Pocholo and their Folies de Mwah! carry on, unwavering in enthusiasm, determined to concoct and serve up fun as they know it.

> There's no way the rather sedate façade of The Venue Tower (652 Boni Avenue) could give any hint that such a scene unfolds, like an apparition while most of the neighbors slumber, six nights a week



HOT PINK welcome number during Japanese Party Night

PHOTOS BY RYAN LIM

DOUBLE EXPOSURE. Glass dance floor reflects lavishly outfitted Folies de Mwah in this Oriental fan dance.

CHRIS Nicolas as Vodka, star of the show

KIMONO KITT. Care for a little Eartha?

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Royalty, rich run for their lives

HONG KONG—Rich and poor alike were swept up by Asia's killer tsunami, with a supermodel, multimillionare football players, royalty and movie stars among those running for their lives.

Czech supermodel Petra Nemcova clung to a palm tree for eight hours in the devastated Thai resort of Khao Lak after being hit by a wall of water in Sunday's deadly tidal waves, her publicist in New York said.

Her British boyfriend, fashion photographer Simon Atlee, is missing.

"People were screaming and kids were screaming all over the place, screaming 'help, help.' And after a few minutes you didn't hear the kids any more," Nemcova told The New York Daily News from her hospital bed in Thailand.

"There were so many people with horrible injuries, with blood everywhere. It was like a war movie," she said.

The 25-year-old, who has graced the front cover of Sports Illustrated's special swimsuit issue and also modeled Victoria's Secret lingerie line, suffered a broken pelvis and internal injuries.

There was no lucky escape for Bhumi Jensen, the 21-year-old grandson of Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej who was killed at the same popular resort area when the waves struck.

Bhumi is the son of Princess Ubolratana and her estranged American husband Peter Jensen. He was holidaying with his mother at the time but she was safe.

SUPERMODEL Nemcova

DIRECTOR Attenborough

British actor and film director Richard Attenborough was also in mourning after the death of his granddaughter in the Thai catastrophe.

Lucy was among a family group staying on Phuket island, said Diana Hawkins, a colleague and friend of the Attenborough family. Attenborough's eldest daughter Jane is missing, as is her mother-in-law, Jane Holland.

"Lord (Richard) Attenborough and his wife, Sheila, have lost three members of their immediate family in the tidal wave disaster that hit the beaches of Thailand on Boxing Day morning," said a statement from Hawkins.

Vacationing action star Jet Li and his family evacuated to Doha, Qatar, after their hotel in the Maldives was swamped by tidal waves, the Apple Daily reported Wednesday, quoting a friend who was with Li.

The actor, who starred in Hollywood flicks including "Lethal Weapon 4" and "Romeo Must Die," injured his foot by knocking it against a piece of floating furniture as he protected his 4-year-old daughter when their room started to flood, the Singtao Daily reported. *AFP, AP*

270 films vie for 5 Oscar slots

LOS ANGELES—Nearly 270 feature films have joined the battle for the 2005 best picture Oscar, organizers revealed Tuesday, but only five will win coveted nominations.

The 5,800 Academy Award voters are faced with a dizzying choice of 267 movies as they begin considering their list of contenders for nominations for cinema's ultimate prize.

"Nomination ballots and a complete list of the 267 eligible films were mailed this week to members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences," the Academy said.

Voters now have less than three weeks to sift through the mountain of films before returning their completed ballots no later than Jan. 15.

Nominations for the 77th annual Academy Awards will be unveiled before dawn on Jan. 25, launching the final frenzied phase of Hollywood's awards season.

Only five films will win nominations for best picture, forcing studios to do desperate battle to win Oscar voters' attention with a blitz of TV, radio and trade paper advertisements in Los Angeles and New York.

Oscar pundits say that Martin Scorsese's Howard Hughes biopic "The Aviator," Clint Eastwood's boxing flick "Million Dollar Baby" and Alexander Payne's road movie "Sideways" appear to be shoo-ins for best picture nods.

Also packing serious heat, according to the pundits, are "Finding Neverland," the story of "Peter Pan" author J.M. Barrie, starring Johnny Depp; "Kinsey," starring Liam Neeson as the famed sexologist; and "Closer," starring Jude Law and Julia Roberts in the story of a love quadrangle. *AFP*

Minnelli hits head in fall from bed

NEW YORK—Actress and singer Liza Minnelli was taken to a hospital after falling out of bed and hitting her head in the early hours of Monday morning, People Magazine reported.

"She was sleeping and she rolled out of bed," People quoted a police source as saying in an article on its website.

"She hit her head," the source was quoted as saying. "Her bodyguard got nervous and he called 911. He said he couldn't get her up. She wasn't bleeding. She was on the floor."

The report said Minnelli, 58, was taken to New York Hospital.

People Magazine said an Emergency Medical Services spokesman had confirmed they received a medical call about an unconscious female from Minnelli's address around 4 a.m.

Last month, Minnelli's former bodyguard and chauffeur accused her of battery and assault and brought a suit against her, seeking more than $100 million in damages.

Minnelli has filed a counter-suit.

Minnelli's estranged husband, David Gest, is also suing her for $10 million.

He claims the singer beat him during drunken rages.

Minnelli has denied this and counter-sued, claiming back that he cheated her out of more than $2 million. *Reuters*

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8 MANO PO 3
9 LASTIKMAN
10 ENTENG KABISOTE
11 SO HAPPY TOGETHER
12 PANAGHOYSA SUBA

sm city fairview
1 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 MANO PO 3
4 SIGAW
5 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
6 SO HAPPY TOGETHER
7 ENTENG KABISOTE
8 ENTENG KABISOTE
9 AISHITE IMASU 1941
10 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
11 SO HAPPY TOGETHER
12 LASTIKMAN

sm city manila
1 ENTENG KABISOTE
2 MANO PO 3
3 AISHITE IMASU 1941
4 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
5 SIGAW
6 SO HAPPY TOGETHER
7 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
8 SIGAW
9 ENTENG KABISOTE
10 ENTENG KABISOTE
11 SO HAPPY TOGETHER
12 LASTIKMAN

sm city sta. mesa
1 ENTENG KABISOTE
2 MANO PO 3
3 SO HAPPY TOGETHER
4 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
5 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
6 AISHITE IMASU 1941
7 LASTIKMAN
8 SIGAW
9 ENTENG KABISOTE
10 SIGAW

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2 AISHITE IMASU 1941
3 LASTIKMAN
4 ENTENG KABISOTE
5 MANO PO 3
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7 ENTENG KABISOTE
8 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
9 SIGAW
10 MANO PO 3

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1 MANO PO 3
2 ENTENG KABISOTE
3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
4 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
5 SO HAPPY TOGETHER
6 LASTIKMAN
7 AISHITE IMASU 1941
8 SIGAW

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1 LASTIKMAN
2 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
4 MANO PO 3

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1 SO HAPPY TOGETHER
2 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
3 SO HAPPY TOGETHER
4 LASTIKMAN

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3 AISHITE IMASU 1941
4 SIGAW

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5 GOLD (DOLBY) AISHITE IMASU 1941
6 GOLD (SDDS) SIGAW
7 GOLD (DOLBY) LASTIKMAN
8 LASTIKMAN
9 HAPPY TOGETHER
10 LASTIKMAN

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2 HAPPY TOGETHER
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2 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
3 LASTIKMAN
4 AISHITE IMASU 1941

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1 (DOLBY) SIGAW
2 AISHITE IMASU 1941

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1 (DOLBY) PANAGHOY SA SUBA
2 (DOLBY) SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
3 (DOLBY) ENTENG KABISOTE
4 (DOLBY) SIGAW

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4 (SDDS) ENTENG KABISOTE
5 (DTS) SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
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2 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
3 PANAGHOY SA SUBA
4 HAPPY TOGETHER
5 (DOLBY) LASTIKMAN
6 SIGAW

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Lane sidelined by bad back

LONDON—Broadway star Nathan Lane has ended his part in the London run of Mel Brooks' hit musical "The Producers" after a back injury forced him to miss several performances.

Lane won a thunderous ovation early last month when he stepped in at the last moment to replace Hollywood veteran Richard Dreyfuss in the London premiere.

"He's been pulled out by his doctor, he's got two slipped discs in his back," Claire Storey of the Drury Lane Theatre's telephone box office told Reuters on Tuesday. "He won't be going back to the show."

London theatergoers had clamored for the chance to see Lane, who created the role and made it his own in New York, where the show won 12 Tony awards.

Tickets until the scheduled Jan. 8 end of his London run had sold out long ago.

Dreyfuss, star of "Jaws" and "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," had also been forced out by injury, leaving writer Mel Brooks to plead with Lane to reprise his role.

The show will continue with a replacement actor. *Reuters*

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SIGAW PG13 12:50,3:10,5:30,7:50,10:10	ENTENG KABISOTE GP 12:30,3:00,5:30,8:00,10:30	SPIRIT OF THE GLASS PG13 12:50,3:10,5:30,7:50,10:00
SO HAPPY TOGETHER PG13	AISHITE IMASU 1941 PG13 1:20,3:35,5:50,8:05,10:20	MANO PO 3 GP 12:40,3:00,5:20,7:40,10:00

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1	MANO PO 3	11:10, 1:30, 3:50, 6:10, 8:30, 10:50	GP
2	SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	12:25, 2:55, 5:20, 7:45, 10:20	PG-13
3	ENTENG KABISOTE	12:30, 3:10, 5:50, 8:30, 11:10	GP
4	HAPPY TOGETHER	12:05, 2:35, 5:05 7:35, 10:30	PG-13

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2 ENTENG KABISOTE
FS 11:20PM, 2PM,
LMF: 4:40PM (GP)

3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS
FS 11:40AM, 2PM,
LMF: 4:20PM (PG-13)

4 HAPPY TOGETHER
(PG-13)

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LASTIKMAN	10:55 12:00 1:10 2:15 3:25 4:30 5:40 6:45 7:55 9:00
MANO PO 3	12:30 2:45 5:00 7:15 9:30
PANAGHOY SA SUBA	1:55 4:20 6:45 9:10
SIGAW	12:35 2:45 4:55 7:05 9:15
SO HAPPY TOGETHER	12:35 2:45 4:55 7:05 9:15
SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	12:35 2:45 4:55 7:05 9:15

ALI MALL CINEMAS

3	Dolby	SIGAW	11:30 1:40 3:50 6:00 8:10
4	SDDS	ENTENG KABISOTE	11:15 2:10 5:05 8:00
5	dts	SPIRIT OF THE GLASS	11:30 1:40 3:50 6:00 8:10
6	Dolby	MANO PO 3	11:20 1:35 3:50 6:05 8:20
7	Dolby	PANAGHOY SA SUBA	10:20 12:45 3:10 5:35 8:00

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ROBEN	BOLD STAR
TANDEM-1	SUGAT
TANDEM-2	KATAWAN MO LANGIT KO
TIMES	SPY - LEGEND OF CROCODILE
QUEZON CITY	
ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	ORIGINAL SIN
ACT-4	HANGGANG KAILAN KA PAPATAY
CORONET A	SALAT SA LIGAYA
CORONET B	A MAN APART
QUEZON-1	BERTUD NG PUTIK
REMAR	X-MEN 2
REMAR-2	BOLD STAR
NOVA MALL - NOVALICHES CINEMA	
A	AISHITE MASU (1941)
B	CLOSED
C	
MANDALUYONG CITY	
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CAINTA RIZAL	
STA. LUCIA EAST	(681-5401 TO 19)
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CINEMA-2	SALAT
CINEMA-3	ONE MISSED CALL
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	POLAR EXPRESS
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-6	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-7	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-8	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	HAROLD & KUMAR
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	ALEXANDER
CINEMA-11 (SDDS)	BAD SANTA
CINEMA-12	NATIONAL TREASURE
CINEMA-14	HONEY
CINEMA-15	B CUZ OF U
LORES	
CINEMA-2	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-3	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT

NE CINEMAGIC - CABANATUAN	
(LAS PIÑAS)	NATIONAL TREASURE
CINEMA-1	PASIYAM
CINEMA-2	BRIDGET JONES
CINEMA-4	POLAR EXPRESS
UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL	
(PARAÑAQUE)	SENSUAL ISLAND
CINEMA-1	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
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GALLERIA 632-9115/16

1 MANO PO 3 • THX 12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00	6 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER 11:10 1:20 3:30 5:40 7:50 10:00
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 10:30 1:20 4:10 7:00 9:50	7 PANAGHOY SA SUBA 11:40 2:15 4:50 7:25 10:00
3 LASTIKMAN 11:50 2:25 4:55 7:25 9:50	8 AISHITE IMASU 11:10 1:20 3:30 5:40 7:50 10:00
4 SIGAW 11:40 2:10 4:40 7:10 9:40	9 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER 12:50 3:00 5:10 7:20 9:30
5 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS 10:30 12:50 3:10 5:30 7:50 10:00	10 MANO PO 3 11:30 2:00 4:30 7:00 9:30

ERMITA 538-7809 to 12

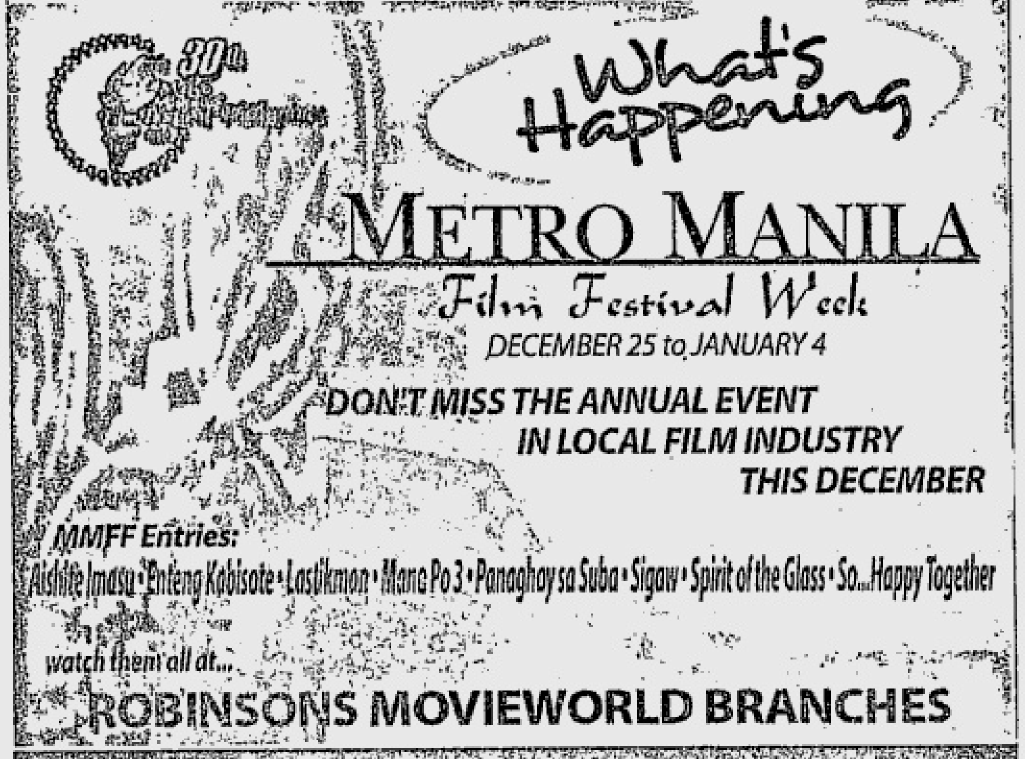
1 ENTENG KABISOTE	11:15 1:50 4:25 7:00 9:40
2 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER 10:35 12:50 3:05 5:20 7:35 9:50	5 PANAGHOY SA SUBA 10:10 12:30 2:50 5:10 7:30 9:50
3 AISHITE IMASU 10:10 12:15 2:15 4:20 6:25 8:50 10:00	6 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS 10:10 12:15 2:15 4:20 6:25 8:25 10:00
4 LASTIKMAN 10:35 12:50 3:05 5:20 7:35 9:50	7 MANO PO 3 10:10 12:30 2:50 5:10 7:30 9:50

METRO EAST 682-8193/99, 682-8280

1 MANO PO 3 10:00 12:05 2:15 4:25 6:35 8:45 10:35	5 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER 10:35 1:00 3:25 5:50 8:15 10:30
2 ENTENG KABISOTE 10:10 12:40 3:10 5:40 8:10 10:30	6 LASTIKMAN 10:10 12:40 3:10 5:40 8:10 10:30
3 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS 10:35 1:00 3:25 5:50 8:15 10:30	7 AISHITE IMASU 10:35 1:00 3:25 5:50 8:15 10:35
4 PANAGHOY SA SUBA 11:20 2:00 4:40 7:20 10:00	8 SIGAW 10:00 12:05 2:15 4:25 6:35 8:45 10:30

NOVALICHES 935-2229/31

1 SIGAW 11:10 1:30 3:50 6:10 8:30	5 PANAGHOY SA SUBA 11:00 1:30 4:00 6:30 8:55
2 MANO PO 3 11:10 1:30 3:50 6:10 8:30	6 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS 10:40 1:05 3:30 5:55 8:25
3 LASTIKMAN 10:15 12:45 3:15 5:45 8:25	7 ENTENG KABISOTE 10:15 12:40 3:15 5:50 8:25
4 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER 11:10 1:30 3:50 6:10 8:30	8 AISHITE IMASU 11:50 2:10 4:30 6:50 9:00



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2 SO...HAPPY TOGETHER 11:00 1:00 3:00 5:00 7:00 9:00	4 MANO PO 3 1:35 4:00 6:25 8:50

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1 PANAGHOY SA SUBA 10:30 1:00 3:30 6:00 8:30	3 ENTENG KABISOTE 10:15 12:50 3:25 6:00 8:30
2 SPIRIT OF THE GLASS 11:30 1:45 4:00 6:15 8:30	4 LASTIKMAN 10:50 1:15 3:40 6:05 8:30

CAINTA 240-4661

1 MANO PO 3 11:10 1:30 3:50 6:10 8:30	3 LASTIKMAN 10:35 1:10 3:40 6:10 8:40
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Jackie Chan, Chow Yun-fat lead Hong Kong celebrity donors

CHAN

CHOW

SHOW STOPPER

HONG KONG—Hollywood stars Jackie Chan and Chow Yun-fat are headlining a string of Hong Kong celebrity donations to earthquake and tsunami relief efforts in southern Asia.

Kung fu king Chan pitched in HK$500,000 (US$64,000) to the United Nations Children's Fund, or Unicef, the group said in a statement.

Chow, who starred in "The Replacement Killers" and "Anna and the King," gave HK$200,000 (US$25,600) to a disaster relief fund set up by the Apple Daily, the mass-market paper reported Wednesday.

Also donating to the newspaper's fund was Stephen Chow, who directed and starred in the comedy "Shaolin Soccer." Pop stars Leon Lai and Andy Lau joined the actor in donating HK$200,000 (US$25,600) each, the paper said.

"Even though this disaster didn't happen in Hong Kong, it happened on the Earth we live on," Apple Daily quoted Lau as saying. "We should not be distinguished by race and national boundaries right now." *AP*

'Phantom' steps into the light

LOS ANGELES—It's a golden, midsummer afternoon outside, but Andrew Lloyd Webber is standing inside a cool, dim chamber—trying to coax "The Phantom of the Opera" out of the shadows.

On one wall, a towering screen shows a costumed choir belting out "Masquerade" while Lloyd Webber and film director Joel Schumacher stand at a sound board full of glowing dials and levers that runs the length of three buffet tables.

Lloyd Webber is listening, Schumacher is watching.

At the end of the sequence, the music turns grim, the camera slides askew and the monster steps forward—but Schumacher yells "Stop!"

The frame freezes, then the screen goes white. "You can't see the phantom yet," Schumacher teases a visitor, "or you'll have to die."

The ghostly hero is finally ready for his close-up. This week, the musical "The Phantom of the Opera" finally ended its 18-year journey to the screen.

Wanted to, couldn't

Lloyd Webber, the iconic composer behind "Cats," "Jesus Christ Superstar" and "Evita," says he has wanted to make a film of the gothic romance since his show debuted in London in 1986. But a number of obstacles—including his 1990 divorce from muse and "Phantom" stage star Sarah Brigh tman, Hollywood's disinterest in musicals and a worldwide collective of aggressive stage producers—kept the musical off the screen before now.

In the early years, Lloyd Webber said, one of the main reasons he wanted to do the movie (to put the show in front of people who couldn't afford Broadway) became one of the main reasons he couldn't do the movie.

"So many of the producers said they wouldn't do it if there was a movie," he said. "It would have been a tremendous disincentive for them. So the movie was put on ice."

A FANTASTIC document is how composer Andrew Lloyd Webber sees the film version.

JOEL SCHUMACHER (right) has coaxed the ghostly hero and his muse off the stage.

He said his actors, directors and other colleagues also urged him to keep "Phantom" in the realm of live theater. Otherwise the millions who traveled to see the thousands of performances might have saved money by going to the multiplex or video store instead.

"Everybody was sort of begging that the movie wouldn't go ahead," he said. "At the time [that] did make sense, to be honest. It was not a good idea."

Tangled ties

Lloyd Webber maintained his interest in the film, and at one point after the stage show was several years old, there was talk of a film version starring Brightman and Antonio Banderas. But when Lloyd Webber and Brightman divorced, the project's legal and emotional ties became tangled.

"It was sort of their baby," Schumacher said. "He says it's his most personal work."

Brightman, whom Lloyd Webber met when she was a performer in "Cats," inspired his crafting of the young diva Christine, who is caught up in the teaching and music of the mysterious phantom—who prefers to stay behind the scenes.

There have been an estimated 65,000 performances of the show in 18 countries—each one evaporates except in memory. A film would be, in Lloyd Webber's words, "a fantastic document."

"The most exciting thing about it," he said, "is to feel that this one is a version of the stage show that, I hope, will be around forever." *AP*

'Baretta' actor smiled, laughed before his wife was shot dead, says restaurant owner

ROBERT BLAKE'S plea "wasn't urgent"

LOS ANGELES—Robert Blake laughed and smiled as he dined with his wife the night she was shot, the restaurant's owner testified at the "Baretta" star's murder trial.

Bonny Lee Bakley was shot May 4, 2001, after dining at Vitello's restaurant in Blake's Studio City neighborhood.

Blake maintains he left Bakley in the car to go back into Vitello's to retrieve a handgun he carried for protection and returned to find her bleeding.

Vitello's co-owner Joe Restivo said Wednesday he did not see Blake come back to get a gun, but noted he was busy with takeout orders. Eventually he saw Blake return, in distress and looking for a doctor.

"He was out of it. He was in hysterics. He was saying, 'We need help,' or 'Somebody hurt my lady,'" Restivo said.

Blake, 71, is charged with murder, lying in wait and soliciting two stuntmen to murder Bakley, 44. If convicted, he could spend the rest of his life in prison. The trial recessed until Jan. 4.

A doctor testified he heard the actor calling out that his wife was bleeding and needed help, but said did not offer assistance because he thought the Blake's cries were insincere.

Hospital administrator Dr. James Michael McCoy said he and a friend were walking nearby when they heard a man shouting for help and banging on the door of a home. McCoy did not know the man was the famous actor.

Something wrong

"I heard a man's voice calling, 'Help, my wife is bleeding!'" McCoy said. "The first impression I had is it was not a call for help. I thought maybe this was a home-invasion robbery."

The doctor said he steered his woman friend across the street to take shelter under a large tree. "Something didn't seem right."

Deputy District Attorney Shellie Samuels asked McCoy if his response was due to the man's demeanor.

"It didn't have an element of distress," McCoy said. "It seemed more cajoling. I felt there was something wrong going on and it would be better to be safe rather than to be exposed."

McCoy said that within minutes he saw the man who had been shouting go into Vitello's and then saw people run out of the restaurant.

On cross-examination by defense lawyer M. Gerald Schwartzbach, McCoy said even then he did not offer to help. He said he was told a nurse was present and later was told the man had a gun.

Asked why he did not think Blake's cries were urgent, the witness said, "Intonation and context create the sense of urgency."

"Isn't it your view that people react in all kinds of ways to emergencies?" asked Schwartzbach.

"Yes, that's correct," McCoy said.

Medical examiner Dr. Jeffrey Gutstadt said his investigation of Bakley's wounds indicated the shooter was more than 1 1/2 feet away, and both wounds were fatal.

"It would not be an instantaneous death," Gutstadt said, suggesting it would have taken three to 15 minutes for Bakley to die but there was little that paramedics could do. *AP*

Fireworks launched from Manila Bay at midnight tonight

AT MIDNIGHT tonight, residents of Manila and other parts of the metropolis will be treated to a spectacular fireworks display at the Roxas Boulevard Baywalk.

Manila Mayor Lito Atienza, who will lead the countdown to 2005, said the fireworks display, which is expected to last at least half an hour, is a special New Year's treat from the city government and GMA Network.

A giant stage has been set up at the Rajah Sulayman Park in Malate across the Roxas Boulevard Baywalk where GMA-7 stars and other celebrities will be performing. To lead the countdown with Atienza is GMA-7 top honcho Felipe Gozon.

The fireworks display will be aired live on GMA-7.

For safety's sake, the fireworks will be launched from a barge anchored in Manila Bay.

The stretch of Roxas Boulevard from P. Burgos up to Vito Cruz will be closed to vehicular traffic starting at 3 p.m. today and will be converted into a venue for a huge outdoor party.

Atienza said the restaurants and cafes along the Baywalk would be open for business.

"People can come as early as three in the afternoon," the mayor said. "They can watch the beautiful Manila Bay sunset, have dinner later at the Baywalk and enjoy the performances we have lined up with GMA-7."

Since Atienza became mayor of Manila in 1998, the city government has been hosting fireworks displays along Roxas Boulevard on special occasions, especially New Year's Day.

Hotels, restos, shops join Makati dusk-till-dawn countdown

IN MAKATI, five-star hotels and leading establishments join the city's own New Year's Eve Countdown party tonight.

Partygoers can savor the specialties of Dusit Hotel, Hotel InterCon, Mandarin Hotel, Manila Peninsula, New World Hotel, Shangri-La Makati, Boboli, Café Havana, Café Mediterranean, Cleos Vanity, Cocina Provencal, El Comedor, Firma, Gerry's Grill, V Bar, Powerbooks Live, Styletto.

There will also be food booths from Don Henrico's, Dunkin' Donuts, Greenwich, Kenny Rogers, KFC, Magoo's, Max's, Mister Donut, Nacho King, Pizza Hut, Quickly, Shakey's, Tia Maria's, Wendy's, Yellow Cab, and Zagu. The booths will be set up along Paseo de Roxas Avenue.

The Makati New Year's Eve Countdown is a dusk-to-dawn street party that will feature a fireworks display and a laser lights show. The world'd best pyrotechnicians are putting up the fireworks display, which they have prepared especially for the Makati event.

There will also be performances by top rock acts Parokya ni Edgar, Bamboo, Kitchie Nadal, Ella Mae Saison, Barbie's Cradle, Sandwich, Asin, Kapatid, Sponge Cola, Cambio, Itchyworms, Imago, Sugarfree, Orange & Lemon, Snafu Rigor & the AB 60's Band, event hosts Ryan Agoncillo and Tony Gonzaga, and Trish and John Hendrix.

The Makati New Year's Eve Countdown is presented by Makati Mayor Jejomar C. Binay and the City Government of Makati.

Binay said tonight's event will be the start of an annual celebration.

The city government has also organized games and will raffle off prizes. Magicians, jugglers, fire eaters, clowns and acrobats will give away party items.

The celebration will start at 5 p.m. and end at 3 a.m. tomorrow.

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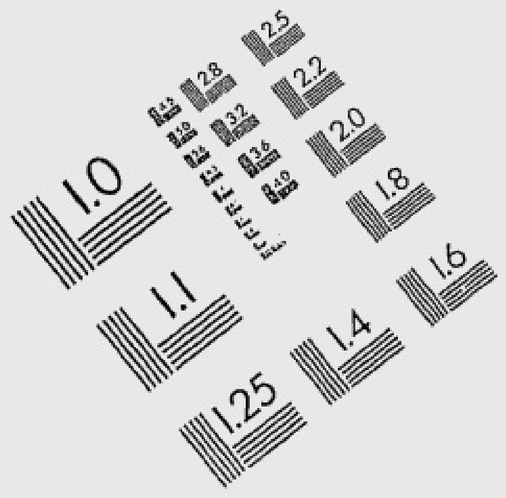
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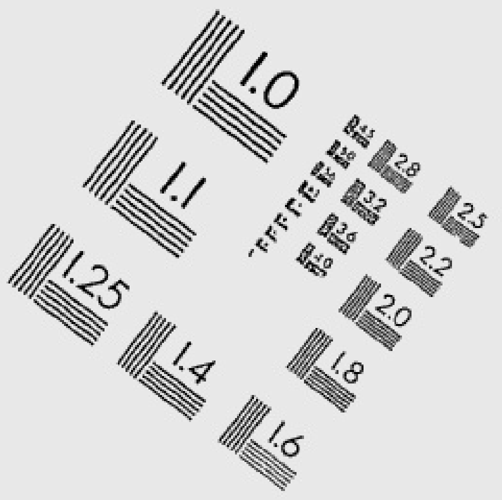
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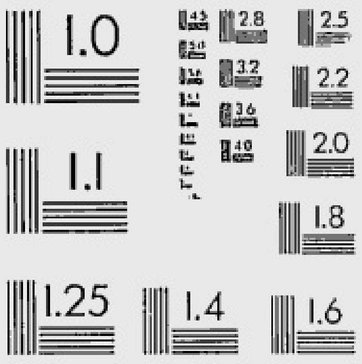
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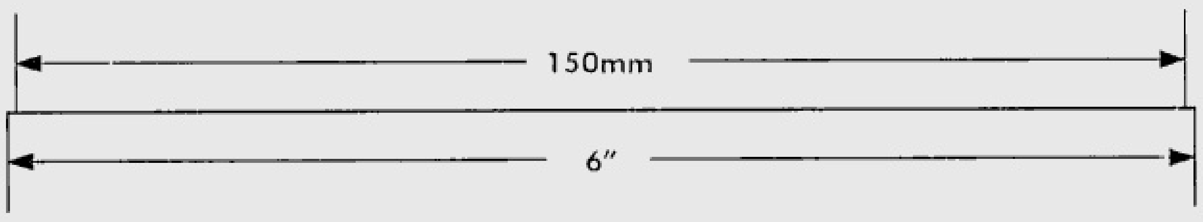

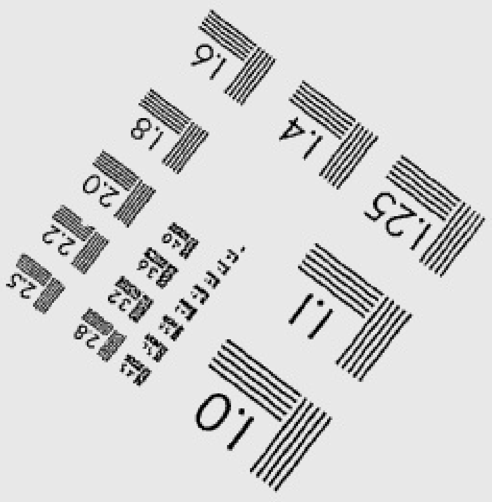
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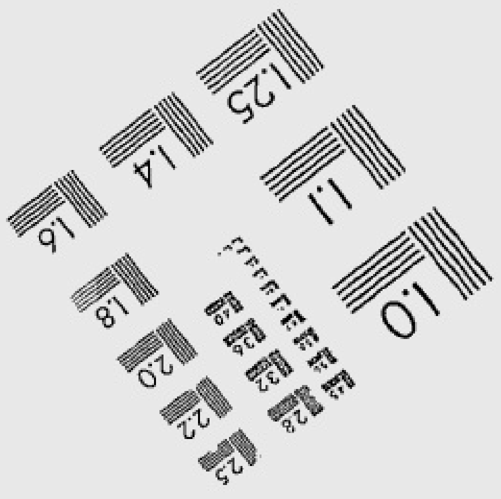
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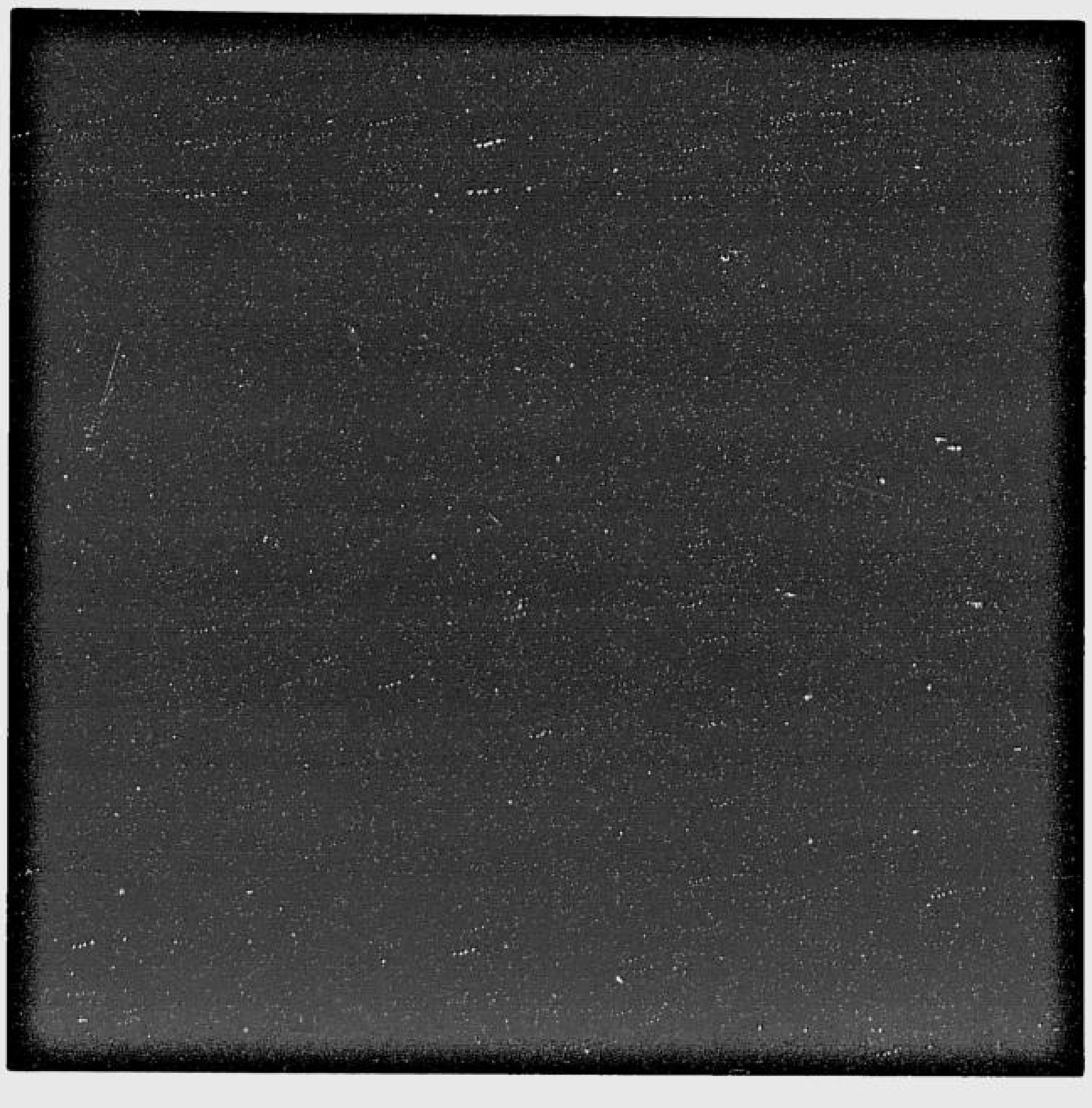

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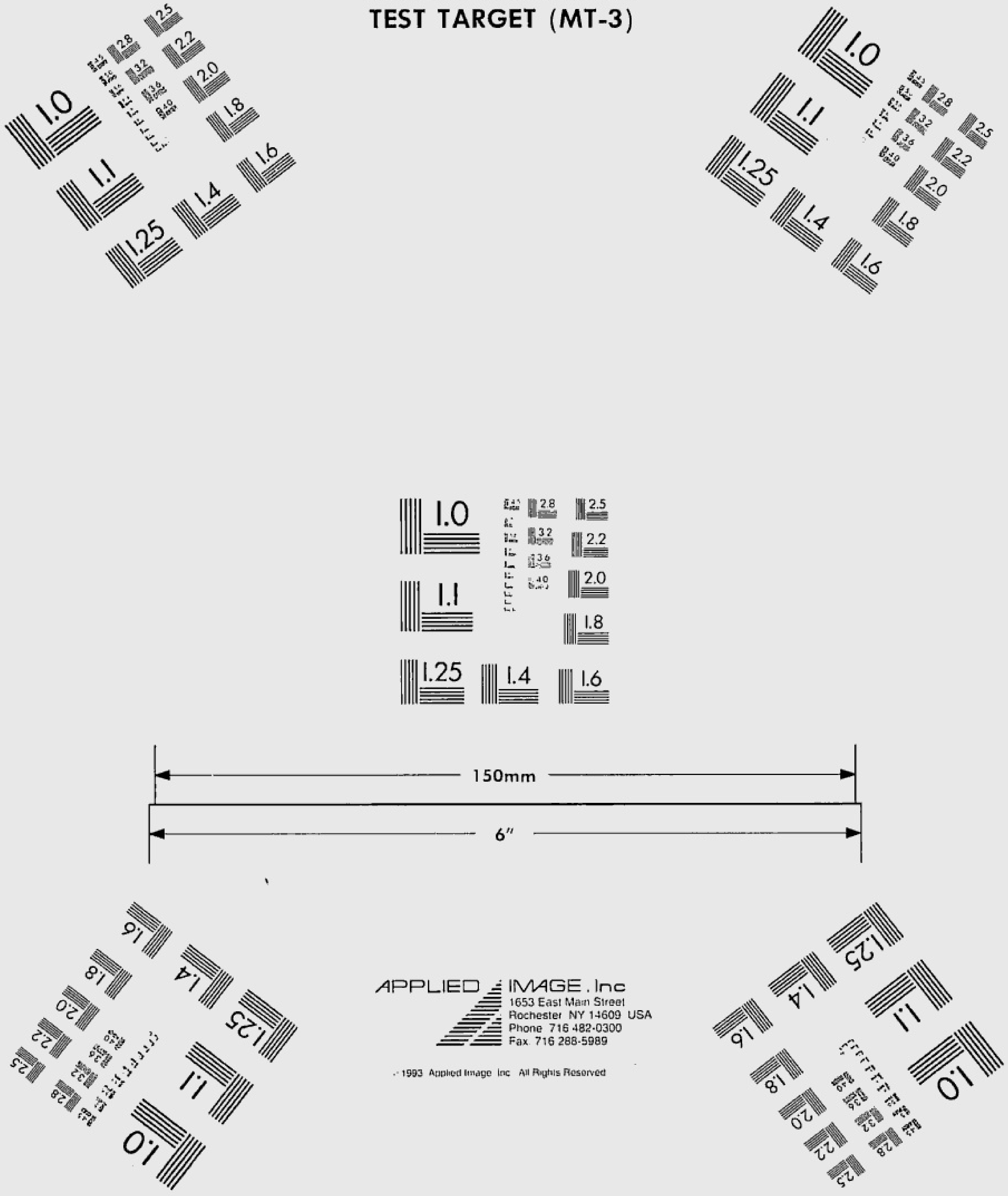
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